PENGUIN CLASSICS

BALTASAR GRACIÁN

The Pocket Oracle and Art of Prudence

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BALTASAR GRACIÁN was born in 1601 in Belmonte, Aragon. The son of a doctor, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1619, was ordained in 1627 and took his final vows in 1635. Teaching in Jesuit colleges across the Kingdom of Aragon, he was also at one time confessor to the viceroy of Aragon and chaplain to the Spanish army at the siege of Lleida, one of the battles against the French during the Revolt of Catalonia. But it is as one of the great Spanish stylists and moralists that he is best known. He wrote a series of short moral tracts marked by their elliptical, epigrammatic style, as well as a three-volume allegorical novel, *The Critic* (1651–7). He also wrote a major work of Baroque poetics, *Wit and the Art of Ingenuity* (1648), in which he exhaustively analysed the nature of the conceit-laden language then in fashion. *The Pocket Oracle and Art of Prudence* was published in 1647. A collection of 300 aphorisms, it influenced the vogue for the form in France, and was quickly translated into the major European languages. Its worldly, calculated advice has made it one of Gracián's most popular and influential works. After being punished by the Jesuits for his consistent failure to obtain formal permission to publish, as required, Gracián died in 1658.

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Translated with an Introduction and Notes by

JEREMY ROBBINS

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Contents

Acknowledgements
Abbreviations
Chronology
Introduction
Further Reading
Translator's Note

THE POCKET ORACLE AND ART OF PRUDENCE

1: *All things are now at their peak, above all being a true individual*

2: *Inclination and ingenuity*

3: *In your affairs, create suspense*

4: *Knowledge and courage contribute in turn to greatness*

5: *Make people depend on you*

6: *The height of perfection*

7: *Avoid outdoing your superior*

8: *Imperturbability, the spirit's most sublime quality*

9: *Belie your national defects*

10: *Fortune and fame*

11: *Deal with people from whom you can learn*

12: *Nature and art, material and craft*

13: *Declared and undeclared intentions*

14: *Reality and manner*

15: *Have intelligent support*

16: *Knowledge and good intention*

17: *Vary your procedure*

18: *Application and capability*

19: *Don't arouse excessive expectations from the start*

20: *A person born in the right century*

21: *The art of being lucky*

22: *A person with wide-ranging knowledge*

23: *Have no blemish*

24: *Temper your imagination*

25: *A word to the wise is enough*

26: *Find everyone's weak spot*

27: *Value intensiveness more than extensiveness*

28: *Vulgar in nothing*

29: *A person of integrity*

30: *Don't make a profession out of discredited occupations*

31: *Know the fortunate, to befriend them, and the unfortunate, to shun them*

32: *Be known for pleasing people*

33: *Know how to leave things to one side*

34: *Know your key quality*

35: *Think things through*

36: *Size up fortune*

37: *Recognize and know how to use insinuations*

38: *Quit whilst fortune is smiling*

39: *Recognize things at their peak, at their best, and know how to take advantage of them*

40: *Be in people's good graces*

41: *Never exaggerate*

42: *Natural command*

43: *Think with the few and speak with the many*

44: *Affinity with great men*

45: *Caution – use it, but don't abuse it*

46: *Conquer your aversions*

47: *Avoid getting embroiled*

48: *Real depths make a true person*

49: *A judicious and observant person*

50: *Never lose your self-respect*

51: *Choose well*

52: *Never lose your composure*

53: *Diligent and intelligent*

54: *Show your mettle, but wisely*

55: *Bide your time*

56: *Quick and impulsive actions*

57: *Those who think things through are more secure*

58: *Know how to adapt yourself*

59: *Leave a good impression*

60: *Good judgement*

61: *Eminence in what's best*

62: *Work with good tools*

63: *The excellence of being first*

64: *Know how to avoid giving yourself grief*

65: *Outstanding good taste*

66: *Make sure of a successful outcome*

67: *Choose occupations that win praise*

68: *Make others understand*

69: *Don't give in to vulgar humours*

70: *Know how to refuse*

71: *Don't be uneven, or inconsistent in your actions*

72: *A resolute person*

73: *Know how to be evasive*

74: *Don't be impossible to deal with*

75: *Choose a heroic model*

76: *Don't always be joking*

77: *Know how to be all things to all people*

78: *Skill in embarking on something*

79: *A genial temperament*

80: *Take care when gathering information*

81: *Dazzle anew*

82: *Take neither the good nor the bad to extremes*

83: *Allow yourself some minor slip*

84: *Know how to use your enemies*

85: *Don't be the wild card*

86: *Forestall malicious gossip*

87: *Culture and refinement*

88: *Let your manner be lofty*

89: *Understand yourself*

90: *The art of living long: live well*

91: *Only act if prudence has no doubts*

92: *Exceptional sense*

93: *A universal person*

94: *Unfathomable abilities*

95: *Know how to maintain expectation*

96: *On moral sense*

97: *Make and keep your reputation*

98: *Conceal your wishes*

99: *Reality and appearance*

100: *A man free from illusion*

101: *Half the world is laughing at the other half, and all are fools*

102: *A stomach for great mouthfuls of good fortune*

103: *Each with the dignity proper to their status*

104: *Understand what different jobs entail*

105: *Don't be tedious*

106: *Don't vaunt your good fortune*

107: *Don’t appear self-satisfied*

108: *A short cut to being a true person*

109: *Don’t be condemnatory*

110: *Don’t hang around to be a setting sun*

111: *Have friends*

112: *Win affection*

113: *In good fortune prepare for bad*

114: *Never compete*

115: *Get used to the bad temperaments of those you deal with*

116: *Always deal with upstanding people*

117: *Never talk about yourself*

118: *Gain a reputation for courtesy*

119: *Don’t make yourself disliked*

120: *Live according to common practice*

121: *Don’t make a great deal over nothing*

122: *Mastery in words and deeds*

123: *A person without affectation*

124: *Be desired*

125: *Don’t keep a tally of ignominious actions*

126: *The fool is not someone who does something foolish, but someone who, once this is done, doesn't know how to hide it*

127: *Nonchalant grace in everything*

128: *A sublime spirit*

129: *Never complain*

130: *Do, and appear to do*

131: *A gallant nature*

132: *Reconsider things*

133: *Better mad with the crowd than sane all alone*

134: *Have double of life's necessities*

135: *Don't be given to contradiction*

136: *Fully understand matters*

137: *The wise person should be self-sufficient*

138: *The art of leaving things alone*

139: *Know your unlucky days*

140: *Immediately find the good in everything*

141: *Don't enjoy the sound of your own voice*

142: *Don't support the worse side out of stubbornness*

143: *Don't go against existing belief to avoid seeming vulgar*

144: *Go in supporting the other person's interests so as to come out achieving your own*

145: *Don't expose your sore finger*

146: *Look beneath the surface*

147: *Don't be inaccessible*

148: *Possess the art of conversation*

149: *Know how to deflect trouble on to someone else*

150: *Know how to sell your wares*

151: *Think ahead*

152: *Never be associated with someone who can cast you in a poor light*

153: *Avoid stepping into great men's shoes*

154: *Don't be too quick to believe or to bestow affection*

155: *Skill in controlling your passions*

156: *Choose your friends*

157: *Don't be mistaken about people*

158: *Know how to use your friends*

159: *Know how to suffer fools*

160: *Talk circumspectly*

161: *Know your pet failings*

162: *Know how to triumph over envy and malevolence*

163: *Never let compassion for the unfortunate earn you the disfavour of the fortunate*

164: *Test the waters*

165: *Fight a clean fight*

166: *Differentiate between a sayer and a doer*

167: *Know how to help yourself*

168: *Don't become a monster of stupidity*

169: *Take more care not to fail once than to succeed a hundred times*

170: *Always have something in reserve*

171: *Don't waste favours*

172: *Don't engage with someone with nothing to lose*

173: *Don't be brittle as glass in dealing with people*

174: *Don't live in a hurry*

175: *A person of substance*

176: *Either know, or listen to someone who does*

177: *Avoid familiarity when dealing with people*

178: *Believe your heart*

179: *Reticence is the stamp of true ability*

180: *Never be ruled by what you think your enemy should do*

181: *Without lying, don't reveal every truth*

182: *A dash of boldness in everything is an important element of good sense*

183: *Don't hold opinions doggedly*

184: *Don't stand on ceremony*

185: *Don't stake your reputation on a single throw*

186: *Recognize faults*

187: *Anything popular, do yourself; anything unpopular, use others to do it*

188: *Be ready to praise*

189: *Take advantage of what a person lacks*

190: *Find the consolation in everything*

191: *Don't be pleased with excessive courtesy*

192: *A truly peaceable person is a person with a long life*

193: *Beware the person who goes in supporting someone else's interests so as to come out achieving their own*

194: *Have a realistic idea of yourself and your affairs*

195: *Know how to appreciate*

196: *Know your lucky star*

197: *Never be hindered by fools*

198: *Know how to transplant yourself*

199: *Know how to garner esteem – wisely, not pushily*

200: *Have something still to desire*

201: *All those who appear fools are, along with half of those who don't*

202: *Words and deeds make a perfect man*

203: *Know the great people of your time*

204: *Undertake what's easy as if it were hard, and what's hard as if it were easy*

205: *Know how to use scorn*

206: *Realize that the vulgar are everywhere*

207: *Practise self-restraint*

208: *Don't suffer from a fool's sickness*

209: *Free yourself from common stupidity*

210: *Know how to use the truth*

211: *In heaven, everything is good; in hell, everything bad*

212: *Always keep to yourself the ultimate tricks of your trade*

213: *Know how to contradict*

214: *Don't turn one stupid mistake into two*

215: *Beware the person with hidden intentions*

216: *Speak clearly*

217: *Neither love nor hate forever*

218: *Don't act obstinately, but with care*

219: *Don't be known for artifice*

220: *When you can't wear a lion's skin, wear a fox's*

221: *Don't be annoyingly impetuous*

222: *A person who is cautious is clearly prudent*

223: *Don't be very idiosyncratic*

224: *Know how to take things*

225: *Know your sovereign fault*

226: *Be careful to oblige*

227: *Don't believe your first impression*

228: *Don't be a scandalmonger*

229: *Know how to divide up your life wisely*

230: *Open your eyes in time*

231: *Never let something be seen half done*

232: *Be a little practical*

233: *Don't get other people's taste wrong*

234: *Don't entrust your reputation to another without having their honour as security*

235: *Know how to ask*

236: *Grant something as a favour before it has to be given as a reward*

237: *Never share secrets with superiors*

238: *Know what you lack*

239: *Don't be too sharp*

240: *Know how to appear the fool*

241: *Take a joke, but don't make someone the butt of one*

242: *Carry things through*

243: *Don't be completely dove-like*

244: *Know how to put someone under an obligation*

245: *Sometimes reason in a singular and out-of-the-ordinary way*

246: *Don't offer an apology to someone who hasn't asked for one*

247: *Know a little more and live a little less*

248: *Don't be carried away by the last person you meet*

249: *Don't start to live just when life has to end*

250: *When should you reason in reverse?*

251: *Human means must be sought as if there were no divine ones, and divine ones as if there were no human ones*

252: *Neither entirely selfish, nor entirely altruistic*

253: *Don't express an idea too plainly*

254: *Don't dismiss something bad because it's minor*

255: *Know how to do good*

256: *Always be forearmed*

257: *Never break off relations*

258: *Look for someone to help you shoulder misfortunes*

259: *Anticipate offences and turn them into favours*

260: *You will never belong entirely to someone else nor they to you*

261: *Don't persist in folly*

262: *Know how to forget*

263: *Many pleasurable things don't have to belong to you*

264: *Don't have careless days*

265: *Know how to really challenge your subordinates*

266: *Don't be bad by being totally good*

267: *Silken words, and a mild nature*

268: *The sensible person does at the beginning what the fool does in the end*

269: *Take advantage of your novelty*

270: *Don't be the only person to condemn what pleases many*

271: *Someone who knows little should keep to what's safest in any profession*

272: *When selling, let your price be that there is no price*

273: *Understand the temperaments of those you deal with*

274: *Have appeal*

275: *Go with the flow, but not beyond decency*

276: *Know how to renew your character using nature and art*

277: *Show yourself off*

278: *Avoid being noted*

279: *Don't respond to contradiction*

280: *An honourable person*

281: *The approval of knowledgeable people*

282: *Use absence*

283: *Be sensibly inventive*

284: *Don't meddle*

285: *Don't perish from someone else's misfortune*

286: *Don't allow yourself to be under an obligation, either wholly or to everyone*

287: *Never act when passions are inflamed*

288: *Live as circumstances demand*

289: *The greatest stigma for a person*

290: *To combine esteem and affection is a real blessing*

291: *Know how to appraise*

292: *Let your natural talents overcome the demands of the job*

293: *On maturity*

294: *Moderation in forming opinions*

295: *Heroic, not histrionic*

296: *A man of many, and truly majestic, qualities*

297: *Act as though always on view*

298: *Three things make a prodigy*

299: *Leave people hungry*

300: *In a word, a saint*

Notes

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I would like to thank Eric Southworth for many and varied conversations on the Jesuits; these have helped immeasurably in sharpening my own thinking on the *Pocket Oracle*. The translation owes more than I can say to David Ingham. He has lived with it without complaint and has always been willing to discuss its many tricky problems. As ever, this is for him.

Abbreviations

Blanco *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, edited by Emilio Blanco (Madrid: Cátedra, 1995)

Ignatius, *Letters* Ignatius of Loyola, *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, translated by William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959)

Romera-Navarro *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, edited by Miguel Romera-Navarro (Madrid: CSIC, 1954)

ST St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*

Chronology

1601 Baptized (8 January) in Belmonte, Aragon, son of Francisco Gracián, doctor, and Angela Morales. During his childhood he spends some years being educated in Toledo with his uncle, a chaplain.

1605 Part I of Miguel de Cervantes' novel, *Don Quixote*, published. Part II published 1615.

1609 Twelve-year truce between Spanish and Dutch. Expulsion of the *moriscos* (descendants of Muslims required to convert to Christianity in early sixteenth century) from Spain (1609–14).

1618 Start of Thirty Years War.

1619 Enters the Jesuit noviciate, Tarragona.

1621 Death of Philip III of Spain; Philip IV ascends throne, aged sixteen. Renewal of war with Dutch.

1621–3 After taking his initial vows, studies philosophy at the Jesuit college in Calatayud.

1623–7 Studies theology in Zaragoza. Ordained 1627.

1627–30 Teaches Latin in Jesuit college in Calatayud.

***c*. 1630** Pedro Calderón de la Barca's play, *Life is a Dream*, first performed.

1630–31 Resident in the Jesuit Casa Professa in Valencia.

1631–3 Teaches moral theology and casuistry in the Jesuit college in Lleida.

1633–6 Teaches moral philosophy in the Jesuit University of Gandía. Takes final solemn vows 25 July 1635.

1635 War with France begins (ends with Peace of the Pyrenees, 1659).

1636 Sent as preacher and confessor to the Jesuit college in Huesca. Friendship with Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa.

1637 (lost) first edition of *The Hero,* a short treatise describing the qualities necessary in any hero, published under the name of his brother, Lorenzo Gracián, without the required permission of his superiors, and possibly dedicated to Philip IV. René Descartes's *Discourse on the Method* published.

1640 Revolt of Catalonia (1640–52.). Revolt of Portugal (1640– 68; ends with independence). Confessor to Francesco Maria Carafa, Duke of Nocera, viceroy of Aragon and, subsequently, of Navarre. Visits Madrid with Nocera. *The Politician*, a treatise sketching the qualities of the ideal politician, King Ferdinand the Catholic (1452–1516), published, dedicated to Nocera.

1641 In Madrid following Nocera's arrest and imprisonment for his actions at the start of the Revolt of Catalonia. Preaches at court.

1642 *The Art of Ingenuity* published. Witnesses the entry (27 July) of Philip IV and his favourite, the Count-Duke of Olivares, into Zaragoza. Made vice-rector of Jesuit novitiate ('*casa de*

probación') in Tarragona, where he will witness the unsuccessful French siege of 1644.

1643 Fall of Count-Duke of Olivares (dies 1645). Death of Louis XIII of France; regency of Anne of Austria during minority of Louis XIV.

1644 Death of Isabel of Bourbon, first wife of Philip IV. French unsuccessfully besiege Tarragona.

1644–5 In the Jesuit Casa Professa, Valencia.

1646 *The Man of Discretion* whose chapters offer a composite picture of discretion, published, dedicated to the crown prince, Baltasar Carlos, who dies the same year. Chaplain to the Spanish troops under Marquis of Leganés at the relief of Lleida, besieged by the French. Returns to Huesca, teaching in the Jesuit college (1646–51).

1647 Revolts in Naples and Palermo.

Publication of *The Pocket Oracle and Art of Prudence*, dedicated to Philip IV's new favourite, Luis Méndez de Haro.

1648 Treaty of Münster (Spain recognizes sovereignty of Dutch Republic). Treaty of Westphalia (ending the Thirty Years War). Spain remains at war with France. Publication of *Wit and the Art of Ingenuity*, an expanded version of his earlier *Art of Ingenuity*.

1649 Marriage of Philip IV to his niece, Mariana of Austria, intended bride of his dead son, Baltasar Carlos. Attends meeting of Jesuit province in Valencia.

1651 Publishes part I of his allegorical novel, *The Critic*, under the name of García de Marlones (anagram of his full name, Gracián y

Morales). Appointed chair of scripture at the Jesuit college in Zaragoza.

1652 Siege of Barcelona ends the Revolt of Catalonia in October. Concern of superiors over his publishing without the required permission of his order. General of Society of Jesus mentions criticisms of his performance as professor of theology.

1653 Part II of *The Critic* published, dedicated to Philip IV's illegitimate son, Juan José of Austria, viceroy of Catalonia.

1655 *Meditations for the Communion-Rail* published with the explicit permission of his order, the only work printed under his own name.

***c.* 1656** Diego de Velázquez paints *Las meninas* (*The Maids of Honour*).

1657 Part III of *The Critic* published. Consequently removed from chair of scripture in Zaragoza, publicly reprimanded, placed on a diet of bread and water, and ordered to leave Zaragoza for Graus (early 1658?). This course of action approved from Rome by the General of the Society, Goswin Nickel.

1658 Considers leaving the Jesuits for another order. Rehabilitated, sent to Jesuit college in Tarazona. Dies 6 December.

Introduction

Gracián's Life and Times

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Golden Age of Spain, were the period in which the country acquired a global empire and its writers and artists – figures like Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Góngora, Calderón de la Barca, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, El Greco and Velázquez – produced the defining works of Spanish culture. The Jesuit Baltasar Gracián (1601–58) is a central figure in the canon of classic Spanish literature. His *Pocket Oracle*, pragmatic, hard-headed and coldly calculated advice on how to thrive in the cut-throat world of Baroque society, has always been one of his most widely read works.

If the sixteenth century was the period in which Spain became the dominant Western power, the seventeenth saw its gradual but inexorable decline. Although Baroque Spain was still far from a spent force, the days of being the uncontested world power were past. Its dominant political position was arguably lost in the middle decades of the century, precisely the time Gracián was writing his best-selling political and moral treatises. Indeed, the 1640s, when

the *Pocket Oracle* was first published, was a decade of crisis for Spain: the country was embroiled in the pan-European Thirty Years War (1618–48), was still fighting in the Netherlands (until the Treaty of Münster of 1648), was at war with France (1635–59), faced the revolts of both Catalonia (1640–52) and Portugal (1640–68) against Castilian rule, and saw the deaths of the queen (1644) and the crown prince (1646). The eventual result of this period of total war was the ascendancy of France over Spain, and whilst this was not necessarily a foregone conclusion in the 1640s, few Spaniards felt any degree of optimism regarding their country's continuing political dominance.

Gracián was born in 1601 in Belmonte, a small town in Aragon, one of the kingdoms that made up the Spanish composite monarchy. In 1619, he entered the Jesuit noviciate in Tarragona and, after the lengthy and rigorous intellectual training for which the Society of Jesus was renowned, he took his final vows in 1635. Like most Spaniards, Gracián never left the peninsula and, aside from brief stays at court in Madrid in 1640 and 1641, his life was spent in Aragon, living and teaching in various Jesuit colleges across the kingdom. This didn't mean that he was unfamiliar with the workings of power, at one stage being confessor to the viceroy of Aragon; nor was he divorced from major events that were reshaping Spain's destiny, experiencing the Revolt of Catalonia at first hand – as army chaplain, for example, he accompanied the army that raised the French siege of Lleida in 1646. He was an active participant in the vibrant intellectual life of Aragon, both in its viceregal capital,

Zaragoza, and in towns like Huesca where he was active in the circle around Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa, an erudite and highly cultured nobleman, famed for his library and extensive collection of antiquities, and credited as the person responsible for publishing the *Pocket Oracle*. (Aphorism 11 offers praise of erudite circles such as that around Lastanosa.) His experience as a member of a religious community, alongside his exposure to greater and lesser circles of power, meant he was familiar with the nature, restrictions and dynamics of hierarchical and competitive social groups, and it is how to negotiate and exploit these that the *Pocket Oracle* teaches.

Prior to the *Pocket Oracle* (1647), Gracián published a series of short treatises that delineated the qualities of *The Hero* (1637), *The Politician* (1640) and *The Man of Discretion* (1646). These treatises, alongside his masterpiece, *The Critic* (1651–7) – an allegory of human life that follows two individuals as they move across Europe in pursuit of Happiness (which is eventually revealed not to be found on earth), acquiring the skills necessary to survive in a duplicitous world – are all written in the linguistically and conceptually complex style that he theorized in *Wit and the Art of Ingenuity* (1648), his major work of Baroque poetics. All but one of his works are secular in focus, exploring, against a deeply pessimistic and often misanthropic vision of humanity mired in deceit and illusion, the complex skills necessary for survival and success. His only explicitly religious work was *Meditations for the Communion-Rail* (1655), which was also the only work he published under his own name. Modern critics sometimes assume that he

wrote this to counter growing Jesuit hostility to his more worldly publications, though in fact criticism was levelled more at his disobedience in publishing these under a pseudonym without the required permission from the Society. Certainly, criticism was voiced over the fact that his three-volume allegory, *The Critic*, failed to include instruction in the teachings of the Church, despite being an allegory of human life from youth to old age. It is Gracián's focus on this world rather than the next, his perceptive account of human psychology and motivation, and his concomitant emphasis on survival *in* the world, rather than avoidance *of* it, which has led many critics to see his work not simply as deeply secular in its focus, but as essentially unconcerned with religion and its teaching, and even as immoral or amoral. This view has had a major impact on the reception of the *Pocket Oracle*, though it is open to question, as we shall see.

A Pocket Oracle: Style and Themes

The title page of the first edition of the work, published in Huesca in 1647, reads: *The Pocket Oracle and Art of Prudence, drawn from the aphorisms found in the works of Lorenzo Gracián and now published by don Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa and dedicated to his excellency don Luis Méndez de Haro, Count-Duke*. The work was opportunistically dedicated to Philip IV's new favourite, Haro, the successor to the Count-Duke of Olivares with whom Gracián had become highly disillusioned. It was published under the pseudonym – Lorenzo Gracián – that he used for most of his works, though despite this pseudonym, it is clear that the real author was widely known and acknowledged. But what was the precise role of Lastanosa in putting together the collection, and are all the aphorisms simply culled from Gracián's own treatises? It is now universally accepted both that Gracián himself was responsible for the collection and that, contrary to the title's assertion, most of the aphorisms were newly coined. Indeed, Romera-Navarro demonstrates that only seventy-two of the 300 have some kind of precedence in published works by Gracián.[1]

But why a 'Pocket Oracle'? The first edition, lacking all the footnotes, and so on, of modern editions, was literally small enough to fit easily in the pocket and, given its lexical and conceptual difficulty and its apparent moral ambiguity, its pronouncements have the standard features of any oracular utterance, being difficult

to understand and therefore liable to being misunderstood. Unlike modern editions which number the 300 aphorisms and place the initial sentence of each in italics, the first edition of the work not only did neither, but also lacked an index. Closely printed, with only a paragraph break between aphorisms, the result is that the reader navigates the text with difficulty, finding it impossible to locate a particular aphorism. One can either read sequentially, or at random, in which case the work becomes truly oracular. The lack of italics in each of the 300 units also forces the issue as to what the term 'aphorism' applies, to the opening sentence or clause, as in modern editions, or to the whole paragraph? In aphorism 251, Gracián's comment after the opening line supports the view that each 'unit' within the *Oracle* consists of an initial aphorism/ maxim (the first term being used once within the text, the latter twice) followed by a commentary, albeit that the commentary is also written in the laconic and lapidary style characteristic of an aphorism.

On stylistic grounds, Emilio Blanco has argued that Gracián wrote the first hundred aphorisms as a distinct block, and possibly even initially envisaged the work having only 100 aphorisms; certainly aphorism 100's air of summary and conclusion is similar to that of the final aphorism (no. 300).[2] Be this as it may, the work lacks any clear structure or overall thematic ordering. However, there are some discernible mini-sequences (for example, nos. 53–7, 156–8, 219–20, 277–8). These suggest not so much that Gracián envisages a sequential reading, but that he realizes that most

readers will naturally glance at several aphorisms on the same page. Many contradictions are deliberately highlighted by these juxtapositions (for example, nos. 56–7, 277–8), whilst others occur between aphorisms more widely separated. Are such contradictions real or apparent? They are certainly juxtapositions designed to provoke deeper thought and consideration, a use of contradiction itself advocated in aphorism 213. But given that Gracián constantly stresses the importance of taking circumstances, which are ever-changing, into account before any course of action is deemed right and appropriate, they are also an indication that few pieces of advice are universally applicable. Gracián's advice is relative, and it is up to the reader to see which aphorism is appropriate for a given situation. This also explains the constant use of qualifiers ('usually', 'often', 'most'), as well as the occasional retraction (for example, no. 244). The text is written with precisely the degree of prudent caution Gracián advocates, and offers general guidelines, not absolute rules. The reader's role is paramount, not simply in interpreting the aphorisms, but in applying them too.

The style of the aphorisms is intentionally and intensely difficult; Gracián's seventeenth-century French translator records a Jesuit commenting how brave it was to translate a work incomprehensible even to native speakers! Difficulty was a goal of the aesthetic of wit, nowhere more so than in the hands of two of its greatest practitioners, the poet Luis de Góngora and Gracián himself. Most Spanish writers followed Horace (*Odes*, III. 1) and shunned writing for the 'ignorant', and in Góngora's assertion that he does not want

to cast pearls before swine, we can see how the pursuit of lexical, conceptual and rhetorical difficulty is intimately and consciously linked to elitism. Gracián himself also links difficulty with pleasure: 'the more difficult the truth is, the more pleasure it causes, and knowledge which costs us is more highly esteemed' (*Wit and the Art of Ingenuity*, VII). This idea is found across his work. Difficulty is also taken as a measure of subtlety and ingenuity, both the writer's and the reader's (*Wit and the Art of Ingenuity*, IV). Easiness, in contrast, is equated with vulgarity, not accessibility. Our difficulty in comprehending Gracián's style also echoes, of course, one of the work's central messages, namely the difficulty of penetrating appearances to grasp things as they really are. Style and message are at one here.

Much of the work's difficulty arises from its intensely laconic style. Whilst brevity and concision are standard hallmarks of the epigrammatic style, here they are taken to extremes, brevity being a highly lauded concept in Gracián's oeuvre. Gracián's individual sentences tend to be epigrammatic, both conceptually and rhetorically, making them more memorable and quotable. The compression of thought into terse, elliptical clauses is one of the defining features of the *conceptista* or conceit-laden style that Gracián employs. The transition between the clauses and sentences that make up each aphorism is abrupt, with the reader frequently needing to smooth the transition and provide the conceptual link. Lacking the smooth and seamless flow that contemporaries associated with Cicero, Gracián instead writes like Seneca. Seneca,

tellingly called an ‘oracle of prudence’ in Gracián’s *The Politician*, was one of the major influences on his thought and one of the very few figures actually named in the *Oracle*. A seventeenth-century description of his style – ‘Seneca writes as a Boare does pisse … by jirkes’[3] – aptly describes the staccato nature of Gracián’s thought as laid out in his sentences here.

The nature of any collection of aphorisms is that there is a redundant excess: most readers remember particular lines or ideas only. There is an inherent danger here that is particularly pronounced in discussions of the *Pocket Oracle*, for many of the best known lines are frequently cited divorced from the rest of the aphorism which may qualify and complicate them. Indeed, an aspect of the collection that is largely neglected is how each aphorism *is* a whole, the sum of its parts, centred on an exploration or explication of the idea with which it opens. Many are a form either of extended conceit, in which a central image not only unifies the whole, but is extended to embrace the various points made, or, given the prevalence of abstract nouns and of these being made the subjects of active verbs, of mini-allegory. Similarly, most aphorisms are unified by a forward logic or argument, however hidden or implicit this may be. That is to say, there is frequently a form of discursive logic running from the opening statement through to the last. The individual aphorisms are thus less fragmented, less atomized, than they may at first appear.

The work’s difficulty is compounded by its marked use of allusion, with quotations and references rarely being explicit, and it

is tempting to see this central stylistic feature as an embodiment of the dissimulation that is frequently recommended. Many arcane allusions are simply left to the reader to fathom. As our familiarity with the classics and the Bible has diminished, so this aspect has increased in difficulty. The allusive nature of the work enhances the collection's oracular quality and was something consciously sought by Gracián, many examples used by him lacking the explicit references they had had when used by him in earlier treatises. Thus in aphorism 53 there is no mention of the fact that the sentence 'he who left nothing until tomorrow achieved many things' refers to Alexander, as there is when the same phrase was employed in *The Man of Discretion*. (We can see here how often the only indication that there is an intended allusion to a specific person is the use of the past tense.) In the same aphorism, the source of the famous motto expressed in the final sentence, 'An august motto: make haste slowly', namely the Emperor Augustus, is only alluded to in the adjective used to describe it. This is also a good example of how adjectives are frequently the primary vehicles of wit, whether used singularly, as here, or, as often occurs, in antithetical pairs.

Two aspects of Gracián's style that are nigh-on impossible to convey faithfully in another language are his extensive use of word-play and puns, and the allusions to, and witty adaptations of, popular Spanish sayings. Given the latter feature, it is clear that the wisdom conveyed by the aphorisms draws not simply on elite, literate culture, but on popular culture too.

Gracián posits a world of deception and illusion, in which appearances predominate and malice and cunning are omnipresent. Hence the distrust, pessimism and misanthropy that characterize his world-view. The key concept here is deceit (*engaño*): this covers, for Gracián, not simply the deception of one individual by another, but our self-deception as to the true nature and value of the world, and hence our deception by the world. It is a term at once moral and epistemological: to fail to know the world for what it is condemns us to moral error and to failure. Because of our tendency to accept appearances and to follow our desires, passions and emotions, we are mired in a world of deceit. There is consequently an urgent need for disillusionment (*desengaño*), the other key concept of the Spanish Baroque. For Gracián and his contemporaries, disillusionment means the realization of the true worth of things, seeing them as they really are: in essence, that this world and all within it is worthless. For many writers, this means explicitly viewing things not from a human or worldly perspective, but from the perspective of eternity, on the grounds that the here-and-now, being transient, amounts to mere appearance, true reality being what awaits us after death. This overtly religious or metaphysical dimension is less emphasized by Gracián, though it is by no means absent from his work. For him, the world is viewed as nothing but illusion, not simply because it is transitory, but because deceit is omnipresent. There is, then, a constant tension between appearance and reality. Most people settle for the former, but the prudent only for the latter, for they realize that reality (both the here-and-now

and heaven) can be lost in pursuit of an illusion. This is why disillusion is said to nourish prudence (no. 100). An absolutely central message of the work, therefore, is the need endlessly to scrutinize and probe beneath appearances.

But settling for reality rather than appearance does not mean that appearance is unimportant, for worldly success depends upon it, and Gracián's originality as a moralist arises from his view that an individual must not simply see through appearances, but be a consummate master in their manipulation. The prudent must always remember that, given people's superficiality, image is everything. Precisely keeping this in mind will enable them to manipulate others. The key to such manipulation is endlessly to evoke surprise and wonder, precisely the concepts at the heart of Gracián's aesthetic as theorized in his *Wit and the Art of Ingenuity*. It also means playing to the crowd. Here we encounter the more cynical side of Gracián, whose blunt honesty can seem cold and calculating to a modern reader: have people to hand to take the blame when things go wrong; use others to do unpleasant things for us; conform publicly to the opinions of the majority, however much we know them to be wrong. Gracián is ever a realist, not an idealist.

The aphorisms start from the basis that our every word and gesture has consequences and so we must be highly conscious of our own, and highly suspicious of others'. The situation becomes more complex, though, given the existence not simply of fools, but of others as self-aware and alert as the reader is urged to be. Our actions and the image we project must therefore play well with two

radically distinct groups, the superficial, who only ever look to appearances, and the elite, who always look beneath them. Here we glimpse a further defining feature of Baroque culture, namely the emphasis it places on the constant need for self-conscious performance. This theatricality, so characteristic of the period, arises both from the belief in transience (the world is a stage, and we are actors) and from the centrality of the visual in Baroque culture (images connected with sight infuse the collection). In court culture, individuals are always on display and can never therefore let their guard down. They must constantly scrutinize others, whilst being aware that they themselves are under constant scrutiny. This can verge on paranoia and, as in the *Oracle*, it certainly fosters an incredible degree of distrust. Only perhaps in Velázquez's masterpiece, *Las meninas* (*Maids of Honour*, 1656), is the self-conscious theatricality of early modern culture and the centrality of the gaze within it laid so bare.

One of the attributes of prudence was the mirror, a recurring visual image in Baroque art and literature, and Gracián places enormous emphasis on self-knowledge, from which will stem self-control. In practice, this means essentially rational control over our passions which cause rash actions, cloud our interpretation of reality and which, if revealed, allow others to manipulate us. This emphasis on reason controlling our irrational nature to secure self-control and accurate judgements is one of the areas in which we most clearly see the influence of Neostoicism, the contemporary fusion of classical, Senecan Stoicism and Christianity that had a profound

influence on European thought in the seventeenth century. There *is* a place for emotion, but its expression needs to be part of a conscious strategy, not a spontaneous and unconscious reaction to situations.

Perhaps above all, Gracián teaches that all things are dependent on time and place, and that the key to success is realizing and thereby exploiting this, waiting for and seizing the opportune moment. This means that patience is a necessary virtue, and accommodation to circumstances paramount. This does not mean that all things are relative, but that most are contingent on circumstance. The corollary of this universal flux is that everything looks different when viewed in a different light. Such a sceptical notion highlights how uncertainty is the norm, and how the senses themselves are regularly deceived if they fail to delve beneath appearances.

The society depicted by Gracián is one driven by status and honour – and above all by the obligation that both of these should impose. Perhaps here more than anywhere else we see the *Pocket Oracle* as a product of its time, Baroque society still being fundamentally feudal, bound together by a culture of obligation and dependency which Gracián views as encompassing the entire noble class. For him, anyone base, and by definition this would include the 'rabble', is incapable of following the dictates of honour. Much of the art of prudence amounts to learning the art of obligation – the ability to make people dependent on you and to place and keep them under an obligation – for the social world is a world of

favours. This art of obligation is conveyed in the language of business, social interaction being envisaged as an economy of debts, credits and loans. The other dominant metaphors for social interaction draw on the language of gaming and gambling. Here the key is to calculate the cost of victory, for Gracián emphasizes that many victories also entail a loss, often precisely of the intangible but vital assets at the heart of Baroque society: honour, virtue and esteem. Any diminution in reputation is a loss of something of fundamental strategic utility.

Thus far I have stressed that Gracián's aphorisms seek to enable the individual to flourish in a society marked by its duplicity, cunning and dog-eat-dog ethos, by using people's inattentiveness, gullibility and essential superficiality to manipulate them. But a further goal in showing readers how to control, act, and project themselves according to the nature of the world is to enable them to become *personas*, true individuals. Gracián envisages life as a constant, arduous process of self-fashioning. A very few will succeed and become truly distinct – 'heroes'. Some will continue on this path of constant improvement and growth throughout their lives. But the majority, being superficial fools, will never even try to become individuals, but will remain part of what Gracián dismissively refers to as the rabble, the undifferentiated mass of humanity. For Gracián, true individuals are the real elite, possessing the intellectual qualities to penetrate his laconic style, to grasp his moral message, and to apply it consistently. Gracián is neither an

egalitarian nor an optimist: few will rise to the challenge and, even among those who can and do, failure is inevitable.

An art of prudence

But where does ‘prudence’ fit in here? Prudence was one of the most important concepts in early modern thought, especially in moral and political philosophy where it was held to be the principal virtue required in the Christian prince. Gracián presents the collection as an ‘art of prudence’ and it is his use of this term in comparison with how it was employed by contemporaries that leads us to the most controversial aspect of the work, namely the degree to which the advice offered is immoral or amoral and the extent to which the behaviour it encourages is Machiavellian.

Prudence has a long history in classical and Christian thought. For Aristotle, prudence, or ‘practical wisdom’, involves us both considering what should be done because good and fitting for us and directing our actions accordingly.[4] In the Christian tradition, prudence becomes one of the four cardinal virtues, alongside justice, temperance and courage; and, as the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas influentially argued, it is the virtue that directs all moral virtues. It seeks to select the most appropriate means to achieve the morally right end, being the virtue that matches moral rules to particular circumstances. It is concerned with practical matters – which is precisely why Gracián calls his treatise a *pocket* oracle since it should accompany us as we engage actively with life – and it operates therefore in the transient realm of contingency. Since we must live amidst the flux of circumstances and ever-

changing events, this means that rigid rules, with the exception of those concerning virtue, are of little use to it (no. 288). In early modern moral and political thought, this process of liaising between the universal and the particular was often conceptualized in terms of a temporal process: prudence applies the lessons of the past to present circumstances in order to ascertain future outcomes. The oft-repeated principle at work here was the biblical concept of there being nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9), which was joined with the idea drawn from Tacitus that men and names change, whilst customs do not. The result was that for many of Gracián's contemporaries, prudence offered a moral and practical guide to the outcome of our actions, a guide that many saw as infallible. Based on the biblical precept just cited, optimistic theorists suggested that by applying the lessons of the past to our present situation, prudence enabled us to be all but certain as to our actions' consequences, and would also make sure that our actions stayed within the bounds of Christian morality. In political writers, therefore, much emphasis was placed on history – whether classical, biblical, or national – as the source of examples that prudence can draw on to gauge the consequences of our actions. Gracián focuses instead on human nature as the key area that the prudent individual must master, since knowing how and why people behave will enable us to adjust our behaviour accordingly to achieve our objectives.

In the seventeenth century, discussions of prudence followed a fairly standard format: a definition of the term; a lengthy discussion

of how it was to be acquired, above all from the study of history and consultation with experienced individuals; and an even lengthier discussion of the problems it encounters and can resolve. These problems tended to centre on prudence's ability to detect deception in all its forms, and the thorny issue of what forms of deception a prince might legitimately use. Such casuistry encouraged a whole vocabulary of deceit to enable moralists to distinguish between acceptable (for example, dissimulation) and unacceptable (for example, simulation and lies) types of deception.[5] Such moral issues were acutely problematic, and not just for monarchs, since absolute honesty could be dangerous: should an English Catholic hiding a priest, for example, admit to doing so if asked by the authorities, despite knowing the dire consequences?

The word 'prudence' appears surprisingly infrequently in the collection. By only using the term when Gracián uses it, I am following his deliberate strategy of extensively using cognate terms, such as good sense, discretion, wisdom, astuteness.[6] Whilst these are often synonyms for prudence, they are treated by Gracián as aspects or component elements of prudence, not as prudence itself. Prudence is thus analysed in terms of its constituent qualities, themselves arising from its specific activities. This approach, typical of Aquinas' treatment of the virtue, introduces conceptual diversity into the discussion of a term all too often treated somewhat monolithically in Spanish moral and political works.

The process of using synonyms for prudence means that the aphorisms work by a process of incremental examination, defining

aspects of prudence by tacitly breaking it down into its constituent parts or its resulting actions – and also by describing the consequences of not possessing such qualities. The result is that we see prudence 'in action'. Often, by turning adjectives into nouns (the wise, the discreet, the circumspect, and so on), the aphorisms offer a description of a person embodying a particular quality desired in those with prudence (for example, nos. 20, 22, 29, 49, 72, 93, 123, 175, 222, 280). Such individuals are effectively posited as abstract ideals. The final aphorism summarizes the qualities dealt with piecemeal across the work, all of which the prudent person should ideally embody. In contrast are the myriad comments made about fools – who are 'common', both numerically and in terms of class, though they are not necessarily restricted to the one class. Their negative portrayal across the collection functions as a counter-example to the prudent, who must also be familiar with the fools' instinctive behaviour in order to manipulate them. But unlike the prudent, the sub-categories into which the stupid can be divided (no. 168) are not exhaustively described; what is more important is how their stupidity manifests itself.

The result is that whilst for the modern reader the *Oracle* contains many aphorisms that seem to have little or nothing to do with prudence, for a contemporary one they would be seen to treat aspects of prudence as analysed by writers like Aquinas. (The work's debts are by no means exclusively to Aquinas, though its substantial intellectual debt to him, largely ignored by modern critics, is hardly surprising given the Jesuits' specific allegiance to

his scholastic theology; St Ignatius, the Society's founder, had particularly recommended the discussion of virtues and vices found in Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*.[7]) Aquinas, for example, repeatedly mentions the three acts of reason that are integral to prudence, namely consultation, judgement and action (ST, II–II, q.47a.8 and q.53a.2), and the *Oracle* places a corresponding emphasis on all three (for example, nos. 53 and 176). Similarly, Aquinas discusses how choosing well is linked to prudence (ST, II–II, q.47a.1), and the same point is made by Gracián (for example, nos. 51, 283). Indeed, the link between choosing well and prudence explains what otherwise might seem a curious aspect of the collection, namely its constant emphasis on taste. If prudence involves, in large part, making the right or the good choice, then it is hardly surprising that taste falls within its sphere, for good taste presupposes the ability to discriminate well and to make good choices. Taste consequently reveals our moral character as much as our aesthetic preferences. We have here the very heart of the explanation of why, for Gracián, ethics and aesthetics are two sides of the same coin.

So, Gracián takes one of the key terms of contemporary moral and political theory and attempts to treat it without simply going over the expected ground, in the expected way. He does this by approaching the expected areas not systematically, but indirectly and piecemeal, using the aphoristic form and epigrammatic style that put a premium on brevity and novelty to create a mosaic of indirection. The collection offers fragments of the art of prudence that a reader must construct into a whole. Gracián defamiliarizes a

long-familiar, indeed clichéd, discourse, reconfiguring how and where its expected elements are placed and treated. By avoiding being systematic, he avoids cliché, and forces a contemporary reader to re-engage with a moral discourse whose terms were in danger of becoming moribund because over-familiar. Style, genre and approach all engage the reader, and force the reader's re-engagement with prudence. The reader is not simply forced to think, but to think about prudence and the contours of a world in which prudence is deemed so vitally necessary.

An early modern reader would have brought a real expectation as to what points and topics a discussion of prudence would contain, and how it would treat these. As I have outlined, neither the form nor the content of the *Oracle* meets these expectations. By overturning and/or confounding his first readers' expectations, Gracián both entertains and challenges, on the one hand to see how key topics are dealt with, and on the other, to make sense – morally – of those aspects of the contemporary discourse of prudence that are downplayed or absent. A modern reader unfamiliar with the early modern discussions of prudence misses entirely this aspect of novelty in Gracián's text and the impact it has on reinvigorating prudence for a seventeenth-century reader. But it is the challenge Gracián thus throws down for the seventeenth-century reader – what to make of the downplaying or absence of key aspects of the standard discourse of prudence – that has largely shaped modern readings of the work, inclining many to see it, for better or worse, as entirely worldly in outlook and even as immoral or amoral.

The key issue is not just how Gracián squares morality with a strategy that seeks to teach us not simply how to survive but how to dominate, but, more problematically for modern criticism, whether he even attempts to do so. This is the most difficult question to answer, both because we are deaf to the classical and theological background regarding prudence that the informed seventeenth-century reader would bring to the work and also because, even granting this background, Gracián presents prudence in a manner that is starkly at odds with how it was presented in contemporary works of moral and political thought. It is attractive but too easy simply to say that the work is immoral or Machiavellian, a reading that has appealed deeply to a modern, cynical sensibility. But equally it is simplistic and too trusting not to see that Gracián's treatment of prudence 'in action' is problematic. The problem arises, of course, precisely because, like the oracle it is, the work embodies its own advice – not laying all its cards on the table, leaving things half-said or unsaid, and keeping people guessing.

Editors and critics can certainly compound the impression of Gracián's scant concern with morality by their treatment of key concepts. The term *synteresis*, for example, is used several times by Gracián. In scholasticism, *synteresis* is an innate moral sense, and it is used in this way by Aquinas in his discussion of prudence. Most modern commentators, however, equate the term simply with judgement or good sense, thereby removing a key moral emphasis from the collection. In contrast, I have translated the term as 'moral sense' throughout. Similarly, whether a major term such as *astucia* is

viewed as ‘cunning’ or ‘astuteness’ impacts on our perception of the work’s morality. Here, to keep the ambivalence that the term had in seventeenth-century moral literature, where it was normally, but not universally, seen as more positive than negative, I translate it as ‘astuteness’. Gracián himself certainly contributes to the work’s sense of moral ambivalence and ambiguity by rarely defining his terms – though it is significant in the context of the present discussion that *synteresis* is carefully defined and labelled the ‘foundation of prudence’ (no. 96). Whereas other writers scrupulously defined the myriad terms they used for forms of deception, for example, explicitly grading these from the acceptable to the forbidden, this is all but absent from the *Oracle*. A striking consequence is the concomitant absence of any sense of difficulty or angst over the complexities of the moral situations people must face, precisely the type of moral anxiety voiced by all other Spaniards when dealing with what was seen as our necessary use of deception. Similarly, whilst the strategies advocated are indeed placed within a moral framework (for example, nos. 90, 120), this is highly generalized and strikingly non-specific in comparison with the emphatic and explicit Christian framework used by other Spaniards in treating prudence. Indeed, the starkest contrast between Gracián’s art of prudence and all other discussions of the virtue is undoubtedly the virtual absence of direct and sustained reference to the dictates of religion. To take two representative examples of the norm: in his *Treatise on the Religion and Virtues a Christian Prince Must Have to Govern and Conserve his State* (1595),

the Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneira emphasizes that prudence comes from God and that we should never break the dictates of God or religion; whilst in his *Idea of a Political-Christian Prince* (1640/42), a European bestseller, the Spanish diplomat Diego de Saavedra Fajardo constantly draws upon the Bible as a source of examples. And there are indeed some uncomfortable aphorisms, morally speaking, perhaps nowhere more so for contemporaries than aphorism 66 where the idea that the end justifies the means – one of the most controversial ideas attributed to Machiavelli – is endorsed. More shocking, perhaps, for the modern reader is his cold realism about the nature of human relations, not least some of his comments about friendship. If La Rochefoucauld seeks in his aphorisms to strip away our self-deceit and so make us confront the centrality of self-love, Gracián assumes that we are already aware of this.

The downplaying of biblical and Christian teaching that in other writers explicitly sets prudence's moral parameters is certainly striking, and was undoubtedly meant to be so. But the problem is whether the cause of this is solely aesthetic (the avoidance of the expected and the commonplace) or also moral (a not-so-tacit signalling of the secularization of prudence as a moral term). For what it is worth, the 1647 censor's licence granted by the Augustinian Gabriel Hernández states that the *Pocket Oracle* 'has nothing against Our Faith […] nor is it a reef on which Christian customs will founder'. As I have suggested, any educated seventeenth-century reader would certainly have brought moral and

specifically Christian interpretative 'baggage' to a reading of the *Oracle* precisely because this is labelled an 'art of prudence'. Given that the whole approach to the virtue – piecemeal, fragmented and elusive as the presentation and analysis of it is – is heavily imbued with Thomistic thought, I believe Gracián intended them to do so.

The Flemish Humanist, Justus Lipsius, who was the major impetus behind the Baroque enthusiasm for Tacitus and Seneca and consequently for Neostoicism, had stated at the start of his *Six Books of Politics* (1589) that the twin guides to civil life were prudence and virtue. Gracián also consistently emphasizes the absolute centrality of virtue and moral probity in his art of prudence (for example, nos. 90, 288, 293). Whilst he is profoundly pragmatic, as when he states that the 'sensible person must adapt the trappings of both body and soul to the fashion of the times', he is also categoric in his assertion that 'only in matters of goodness does this rule of life not apply, for you should always practise virtue' (no. 120). The work does not advocate that we should only cultivate and care about appearances, as many modern readings of one of the collection's most quoted aphorisms (no. 130) suggest, but rather, given that we necessarily must live in the world, reality *and* appearances.

But is the work's morality Christian or secular? The work delineates precisely 'a man free from illusion: a wise Christian, a worldly philosopher' (no. 100) and its whole outlook is premised on the world being poised between heaven and hell (no. 211). As with their more numerous classical counterparts, so biblical allusions are present, but not overtly signalled. Aphorisms that on the face of it

can appear to be starkly amoral (for example, aphorism 77's 'Know how to be all things to all people') have clear biblical precedent, in this case one of St Paul's injunctions. This injunction had in turn been repeatedly commended by St Ignatius, making this one of the most distinctly *Jesuit* aphorisms in the entire collection. One of the clichés concerning the Jesuits was precisely the emphasis they put on accommodation; not total assimilation to another culture, but a careful and calculated accommodation to the temperament and character of anyone they dealt with. Ignatius' letters constantly recommend such accommodation and his early biographers also emphasize this aspect of his way of dealing with the world. It was in part precisely this procedure that led to the Jesuits being described as worldly and morally lax, not least in Pascal's blisteringly polemical *Provincial Letters* (1656–7). Not surprisingly, the *Oracle* is in many ways an intensely Jesuit work and it is strange therefore that modern criticism has largely ignored the Jesuit culture central to Gracián's formation, not to mention the many parallels between his advice and Ignatius'. (Reading early modern Jesuit lives of Ignatius, it is striking how the saint's recorded actions and attitudes embody the specifics of much of Gracián's advice, or vice versa.) In general terms, the work's Jesuit outlook is evident not simply in its very heavy emphasis on accommodating one's behaviour, language, and so on, to the ways of the world, but equally in its emphasis on practicality (no. 232). This emphasis is intimately connected with the Jesuit 'way of proceeding', which one of the earliest Jesuits had defined as '*spiritu, corde, practice*' ('in the

Spirit, from the heart, practically').[8] Both aspects are consonant with the nature of prudence itself, which engages with particulars for the purpose of action, and it is perhaps no coincidence that Daniello Bartoli's 1650 life of Ignatius comments on how prudence governed his every action.

But as with the Jesuits in general, so in the *Pocket Oracle* there is a bottom line to such pragmatic accommodation. Its own way of proceeding is set out in another of the most famous aphorisms, which cites Ignatius to the effect that 'Human means must be sought as if there were no divine ones, and divine ones as if there were no human ones' (no. 251). So self-evident is this deemed to be that it is the *only* aphorism not given any commentary or elucidation. Throughout the work Gracián precisely follows the first part of this aphorism, whilst not expecting his readers to forget the second, as can be seen in the work's final aphorism (no. 300), 'in a word, a saint'. Aphorism 300 provides a sharp slap in the face to all who have been reading the work cynically, opportunistically, or immorally. In a strategically acute way, Gracián thus closes the work with an aphorism that makes the seventeenth-century reader realize that the picture they have possibly constructed of the advice offered may need reconfiguring, that the pieces of the puzzle may need rearranging. It is a way of testing the reader's prudence precisely by jolting them with what they may have ignored, both in and beyond the text. Of course, for some, it may be too little, too late.

An explicit and specific moral framework is unnecessary given contemporary understandings of prudence, and Gracián not only avoids stating the obvious but also, in so doing, surprises and thereby provokes the reader by not meeting tired expectations. But this, of course, is a high-risk strategy. By downplaying the expected Christian emphasis, the possibility is created not simply for prudence to become a more secular moral concept, but also, thereby, a more Machiavellian one should a reader wish it. That is to say, since readers are largely left to themselves to decide what exactly 'virtue' is, precisely because Gracián refrains from larding the work with biblical and/or Christian imperatives, they are left to decide what exactly constitutes good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, behaviour, and to set the boundaries for their actions as they see fit. Gracián thus grants the reader an unexpected degree of moral maturity, though he thereby also opens the way to readers' granting themselves a degree of moral latitude, precisely what other writers sought to avoid by making Christian imperatives and examples explicit. This, however, is the risk inherent in Gracián having taken to the extreme the Jesuit emphasis on free will.

Whether Gracián, in writing his aphorisms in the way that he did, intended a purely worldly reading of the work remains a question for each reader, but as we have become ever more removed from the specifics of a culture in which prudence was such a central concept, so the temptation to presuppose that he did has become ever greater. And perhaps the question of whether the work's morality is Christian or secular is now ultimately academic.

The very fact that Christianity is not explicitly foregrounded has been a key factor in the continued attraction of the work, for much of Gracián's advice and acute psychology is pertinent to surviving and thriving in *any* society, whether religious or secular in nature. The motivations, behaviour and inattentiveness of people are something of a constant. The world of the seventeenth-century court is not that far removed from modern society.

Notes

1. See Romera-Navarro, pp. xxv–xxvi.
2. See Blanco, pp. 45–7.
3. John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, edited by Oliver Lawson Dick (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p. 186.
4. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.4–5, 7, 10 (1140a–b, 1141b, 1143a).
5. Torquato Accetto's 1641 definition of these two terms holds true for many writers in Spain: 'One simulates that which is not, and dissimulates that which is' (*On Honest Dissimulation*, VIII).
6. In the Vulgate, wisdom is equated with prudence (Proverbs 10:23). This explains the frequency with which 'the wise' are talked about within the *Oracle*. See also ST, II–II, q.47a.2 and q.55a.1.
7. See John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 146, 249.
8. Ibid. p.251.

Further Reading

As is to be expected, the vast majority of critical work on Gracián is in Spanish. A review of some of the most recent such criticism can be found in Robbins, 'Baltasar Gracián (1601–2001)'.

Elliott, J. H., *Imperial Spain 1469–1716* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981)

Hafter, Monroe Z., *Gracián and Perfection: Spanish Moralists of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966)

Höpfl, Harro, *Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540–1630* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Ignatius of Loyola, *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, translated by William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959)

O'Malley, John W., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1994)

Robbins, Jeremy, *Challenges of Uncertainty: An Introduction to Seventeenth-Century Spanish Literature* (London: Duckworth, 1998)

——, ‘Baltasar Gracián (1601–2001)’, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 80 (2003), 41–55

——, *Arts of Perception: The Epistemological Mentality of the Spanish Baroque, 1580–1720* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007)

Wilson, Peter H., *Europe’s Tragedy: A History of the Thirty Years War* (London: Allen Lane, 2009)

Translator's Note

Like any critic of the work, I owe an enormous debt to the standard critical edition by Miguel Romera-Navarro (Madrid: CSIC, 1954). This has provided the initial base text which I have modified on occasion in consultation with the facsimile of the first edition edited by Aurora Egido (Zaragoza: Gobierno de Aragón and Institución 'Fernando el Católico', 2001). I have also consulted the excellent edition by Emilio Blanco (Madrid: Cátedra, 1995).

Any attempt to reproduce fully the rhetorical and lexical complexities of the Spanish would simply read now as bad English. This said, I have endeavoured to keep the translation as terse and concise as the original and, as mentioned in the Introduction, to follow Gracián in his use of vocabulary, synonyms, and so on. As with most early modern texts, Gracián's presupposes a male reader. I have kept the translation gender neutral ('the wise', for example, rather than 'the wise man'), except in those cases where Gracián uses the emphatically male form *varón* over the more generic term *hombre,* and where it is clear that the allusion is to a specific male figure, as then explained in the notes. The notes themselves could have been multiplied tenfold. I have largely restricted them to

explaining references and allusions necessary to an understanding of the text and to identifying major sources, so as to give a sense of Gracián's literary and intellectual debts.

1:

All things are now at their peak, above all being a true individual. It takes more today to make one sage than seven in years gone by,[1] and more to deal with a single person than an entire nation in the past.

2:

Inclination and ingenuity.[2] The two axes around which talents shine: one without the other, only half the happiness. Intelligence is not enough; you need also the right disposition. The misfortune of fools: to make unsuitable choices regarding their position in society, occupation, dwelling-place and friendships.

3:

In your affairs, create suspense. Admiration at their novelty means respect for your success. It's neither useful nor pleasurable to show all your cards. Not immediately revealing everything fuels anticipation, especially when a person's elevated position means expectations are greater. It bespeaks mystery in everything and, with this very secrecy, arouses awe. Even when explaining yourself, you should avoid complete frankness, just as you shouldn't open yourself up to everyone in all your dealings. Cautious silence is the

refuge of good sense. A decision openly declared is never respected; instead, it opens the way to criticism, and if things turn out badly, you'll be unhappy twice over. Imitate divinity's way of doing things to keep people attentive and alert.

4:

Knowledge and courage contribute in turn to greatness. Since they are immortal, they immortalize. You are as much as you know, and a wise person can do anything. A person without knowledge is a world in darkness. Judgement and strength, eyes and hands; without courage, wisdom is sterile.

5:

Make people depend on you. An image is made sacred not by its creator but by its worshipper.[3] The shrewd would rather people needed them than thanked them. To put your trust in vulgar gratitude is to devalue courteous hope, for whilst hope remembers, gratitude forgets. More can be gained from dependence than from courtesy; once thirst is quenched, people turn their backs on the fountain, and an orange once squeezed is tossed in the mud. When dependence ends, so does harmony, and with it esteem. Let experience's first lesson be to maintain and never satisfy dependence, keeping even royalty always in need of you. But you shouldn't go to the extreme of being so silent as to cause error, or make someone else's problems incurable for your own benefit.

6:

The height of perfection. No one is born complete; perfect yourself and your activities day by day until you become a truly consummate being, your talents and your qualities all perfected. This will be evident in the excellence of your taste, the refinement of your intellect, the maturity of your judgement, the purity of your will. Some never manage to be complete; something is always missing. Others take a long time. The consummate man, wise in word and sensible in deed, is admitted into, and even sought out for, the singular company of the discreet.

7:

Avoid outdoing your superior. All triumphs are despised, and triumphing over your superior is either stupid or fatal. Superiority has always been detested, especially by our superiors. Caution can usually hide ordinary advantages, just as it conceals beauty with a touch of carelessness. There will always be someone ready to admit others have better luck or temperaments, but no one, and especially not a sovereign, that someone has greater ingenuity. For this is the sovereign attribute and any crime against it is lese-majesty. Sovereigns, then, desire sovereignty over what matters most. Princes like to be helped, but not surpassed. Advice should be offered as if a reminder of what they've forgotten, not an insight that they've never had. The stars teach us such subtlety, for though

they are children of the sun and shine brilliantly, they never compete with it in all its radiance.

8:

Imperturbability, the spirit's most sublime quality. An impassive person's very superiority frees them from subjection to vulgar, passing impressions. There's no greater mastery than mastery over yourself and your emotions; it amounts to a triumph of free will. And when passion affects you, don't let it affect your office, least of all when this is important. This is an intelligent way of avoiding upsets and a shortcut to renown.

9:

Belie your national defects. Water acquires the good and bad qualities of the channels it passes through, people those of the country where they're born. Some owe more than others to their birthplace, for the heavens were more propitious to them there. No country, even the most civilized, is free from some national failing which neighbouring countries will always criticize, either for advantage or solace. It's a skilful triumph to correct, or at least to conceal, these national faults; you'll gain credit as unique among your countrymen, for what's least expected has always been more esteemed. There are also defects of lineage, status, occupation and age which, if they all appear in one person and are not carefully forestalled, will produce an unbearable monster.

10:

Fortune and fame. Whilst one is fickle, the other is firm. The first for this life, the second for what follows; the former against envy, the latter against oblivion. Fortune is desired and may sometimes be helped along; fame is actively sought. A desire for reputation arises from virtue. Fame was and is the sister of giants. She works through extremes: either monsters or prodigies, abhorred or applauded.

11:

Deal with people from whom you can learn. Let friendly interchange be a school of erudition, and conversation, civilized instruction. Make friends your teachers, joining learning's usefulness and conversation's pleasure. The intelligent combine two pleasures, enjoying the applause that greets what they say and the instruction received from what they hear. Usually, we are drawn to someone through our own interest, but here, that interest is ennobled. The circumspect frequent the company of eminent individuals whose houses are theatres of greatness rather than palaces of vanity. There are those renowned for their discretion whose example and behaviour are oracles in all matters of greatness and whose entourages are also courtly academies of good and gallant discretion.

12:

Nature and art, material and craft. Beauty always needs a helping hand, and perfection is rough without the polish of artifice. It helps what is bad and perfects what is good. Nature usually lets us down when we need it most; let us then turn to art. Without it, our nature even at its best lacks refinement, and when culture is lacking, perfection remains incomplete. Everyone seems coarse without artifice, and everyone needs its polish in all areas to be perfect.

13:

Declared and undeclared intentions. Life is a campaign against malice. Shrewdness fights by strategically using such intentions. It never does what it seems it will, taking aim, but only to mislead. It dextrously insinuates one thing, and then does what is completely unexpected, always careful to throw others off track. It gives out its intention so as to guarantee a rival's attention, and immediately does the opposite, triumphing with the unexpected. But penetrating intelligence, ever attentive, is prepared for this, cautiously lies in wait for it, understands the opposite of what it's intended to understand, and immediately detects any attempt at concealment. It passes over declared intentions, and waits for the real ones that lie beneath, and even the ones beneath those. Simulation increases when its artifice is discovered, and tries to deceive by using truth itself. It changes its game by changing its stratagem; its artifice is then its very lack of artifice, its astuteness based on total candour. Observation comes along and, recognizing this perspicacious

strategy, uncovers the darkness beneath this veil of light. It deciphers the true intention, all the more hidden for being so simple. In this way, the craftiness of Python fights the candour of Apollo's penetrating rays.[4]

14:

Reality and manner. Substance is insufficient, circumstance is also vital. A bad manner ruins everything, even justice and reason. A good manner makes up for everything: it gilds a 'no', sweetens truth, and beautifies old age itself. How something is done plays a key role in all affairs, and a good manner is a winning trick. Graceful conduct is the chief ornament of life; it gets you out of any tight situation.

15:

Have intelligent support. The good fortune of the powerful: to be accompanied by outstanding minds that can save them from tight spots caused by their own ignorance and fight difficult battles for them. It shows exceptional greatness to make use of wise people, far better than the barbarous preference of Tigranes who wanted conquered kings as his servants.[5] A new type of mastery over what's best in life: skilfully make those whom nature made superior your servants. There's much to know and life is short, and a life without knowledge is not a life. It's a singular skill effortlessly to learn much from many, gaining knowledge from all. Then you can speak

in a meeting for many or, through your words, as many wise people as advised you will speak. You'll gain a reputation as an oracle through the sweat of others. Your learned helpers first select the subject, and then distil their knowledge and present it to you. If you can't have wisdom as your servant, at least be on intimate terms.

16:

Knowledge and good intention. They ensure repeated success. Sound understanding and evil intent have always been a monstrous and violent union. Malevolent intention poisons all perfection; aided by knowledge, it harms with greater subtlety. How miserable any eminent quality when used to cause harm! Knowledge without sense, double folly.

17:

Vary your procedure. Not always the same way, so as to confound those observing you, especially if they are rivals. Don't always fulfil your declared intentions, for others will seize on your predictability, anticipating and frustrating your actions. It's easy to kill a bird that flies straight, but not one that twists and turns. But don't always do the opposite of what you say, for the trick will be understood the second time around. Malice is always lying in wait – great subtlety is needed to mislead it. Sharp players never move the piece their opponents are expecting, and especially not the one they want them to.

18:

Application and capability. There is no distinction without both of these, and superlative distinction when they occur together. An average person achieves more with application than a superior one does without. Reputation is won through hard work; what costs little is worth little. Even in some of those in the highest positions, application has been found wanting; rarely can we overcome our natural temperament. Not to be exceptional in a mundane pursuit, because you prefer being average in a sublime one, can at least be excused as noble. But there is no excuse if you are happy being average in a mundane position, when you could be outstanding in a sublime one. Both nature and art are needed, topped off with application.

19:

Don't arouse excessive expectations from the start. Everything initially highly praised is commonly discredited when it subsequently fails to live up to expectation. Reality can never match our expectations, because it's easy to imagine perfection, and very difficult to achieve it. Imagination weds desire and then conceives things far greater than they actually are. However great anything excellent is, it's never enough to satisfy our idea of it and, misled by excessive expectation, we're more likely to feel disillusionment than admiration. Hope is a great falsifier of truth. Good sense should rectify this, making sure enjoyment surpasses desire. Good

beginnings serve to arouse curiosity, not to guarantee the outcome. Things turn out better when the reality exceeds our initial idea and is greater than we anticipated. This rule doesn't apply where bad things are concerned. Here exaggerated expectation is helpful, for reality thankfully contradicts it, and what was greatly feared can in fact even seem tolerable.

20:

A person born in the right century. Truly outstanding people depend on their times. Not all were born at the time they deserved, and many, though they were, didn't manage to take advantage of it. Some were worthy of a better century, for every good doesn't triumph at all times. Everything has its time; even what's outstanding is subject to changing taste. But wisdom has the advantage of being eternal, and if this is not its century, many others will be.

21:

The art of being lucky. Fortune has its rules, for not everything is a matter of chance for the wise. It can be helped along by diligence. Some are happy just to stand confidently at Fortune's door waiting for her to open it. Others do better. Intelligently audacious, they press on and, on the wings of their virtue and courage, they catch up with good fortune and flatter her to good effect. But according to

the best philosophy, there's no other way than virtue and vigilance, for the only good or bad luck is prudence or imprudence.

22:

A person with wide-ranging knowledge. Urbane and pleasant erudition is the ammunition of the discreet. A practical knowledge of current affairs, news not gossip. Have a store of witty sayings and gallant deeds, and know when to use them, for a joke, not a pedantic sermon, is often the best way to offer advice. Wisdom gained in conversation has been more useful to some than the seven arts,[6] however liberal.

23:

Have no blemish. They are perfection's misfortune. Few are without flaws, both moral and physical, and they get worked up over them, though they can be easily rectified. Good sense feels pity when great talents and accomplishments are tarnished by a minor flaw, for it only takes one cloud to eclipse the sun.[7] Malice notices such blots on our reputation and dwells on them. It's a sign of supreme skill to turn such negatives into positives, as Caesar did when he crowned his natural defect[8] with laurels.

24:

Temper your imagination. Sometimes restrain it, sometimes urge it on, for happiness entirely depends on it, and it even regulates good sense. It can become a tyrant, not content simply to speculate, but wanting to act, even taking over your life, making it a joy or a burden according to whatever nonsense it hits upon, because it makes us satisfied or dissatisfied with ourselves. To some, as the scourge of fools, it presents only difficulties. To others, it happily and vainly proposes success and adventure. This can happen unless our prudent moral sense[9] reins it in.

25:

A word to the wise is enough. The art of arts used to be knowing how to reason and debate. This is no longer enough. Now you need to be able to read minds, especially when things are not what they seem. You will never be wise unless a word suffices. There are clairvoyants of the heart, and sharp-eyed lynxes of true intentions. The truths which matter most are always only half-spoken. Let the circumspect fully grasp these, reining in their credulity if they're favourable, spurring it on, if they're not.

26:

Find everyone's weak spot. This is the art of moving people's wills. It consists more in skill than determination – a knowledge of how to get inside each person. Everyone's will has its own particular predilection, all different according to the variety of tastes. We all

idolize something: for some, esteem; for others, self-interest; and for most, pleasure. The trick to influencing people lies in knowing what they idolize. Knowing each person's driving impulse is like having the key to their will. You should go direct to what most motivates a person, normally something base rather than anything noble, for there are more self-indulgent people than self-controlled ones in the world. You should first divine someone's character, then touch upon their fixation, and take control of their driving passion which, without fail, will defeat their free will.

27:

Value intensiveness more than extensiveness. Perfection consists in quality, not quantity. Everything very good has always been brief and scarce; abundance is discreditable. Even among people, giants are usually the true dwarves. Some value books for their sheer size, as if they were written to exercise our arms not our wits. Extension alone can never rise above mediocrity, and the misfortune of all-embracing individuals is that, wanting to deal with everything, they deal with nothing. Intensity leads to distinction, and to heroic distinction if the matter is sublime.

28:

Vulgar in nothing. Not in matters of taste. How truly wise the man who was unhappy at the thought he might please the masses![10] An excess of applause from the vulgar never satisfies the discreet. Some

are such chameleons[11] of popularity that they take delight in the bad breath of the crowd, not the sweet breezes of Apollo. Nor in matters of understanding. Take no pleasure in the miracles of the mob, which are merely foolish bedazzlements, common stupidity being astonished, singular observation, disillusioned.

29:

A person of integrity. Always on the side of reason, with such tenacity of purpose that neither vulgar passion nor tyrannical violence forces them ever to step over the line of reason. But who will ever be such a phoenix of rectitude? For integrity has few genuine admirers. Many applaud it, but don't embrace it. Others pursue it until things get tricky; then the insincere disown it and politicians conceal it. Integrity doesn't hesitate to set itself against friendship, power or even its own interests, and then the critical issue of disowning it arises. The astute draw fine distinctions with their much applauded sophistry, so as not to offend reason or reason of state.[12] But the steadfast man will judge dissimulation a form of treason, pride himself more on tenacity than on shrewdness, and always be found on the side of truth. And if he gives up on people, this is not because he is fickle, but because they have given up on truth.

30:

Don't make a profession out of discredited occupations. Much less out of delusions, which only bring scorn, not credit. Our whims have

founded many sects, and the sensible man must shun them all. There are those with outlandish tastes who espouse everything the wise repudiate; they delight in every peculiarity, and although this makes them widely known, it's more from ridicule than respect. The circumspect should not draw attention to themselves even in a profession worthy of the wise, much less in ones that make their followers ridiculous. As common disrepute has long identified each of these, they need not be specified here.

31:

Know the fortunate, to befriend them, and the unfortunate, to shun them. Misfortune is normally the crime of fools – and nothing is more contagious. You should never open the door to the smallest ill, for others, both many and greater, will come in after it and ambush you. The greatest trick is to know which cards to throw away: the lowest card that wins the current game is worth more than the highest that won an earlier one. If in doubt, a good move is to attach yourself to the wise and the prudent, for sooner or later they'll meet with good fortune.

32:

Be known for pleasing people. To please is greatly to the credit of rulers, a quality that enables sovereigns to gain universal favour. The one advantage of ruling is precisely this, to be able to do more good than others. True friends are those who do favours. In

contrast, others are set on pleasing no one, not so much because it's tiresome as out of malignancy, being entirely opposed to such divine dealings.

33:

Know how to leave things to one side, for if knowing how to refuse is one of life's great lessons, an even greater one is knowing how to say no to yourself, to important people, and in business. There are non-essential activities, moths of precious time, and it's worse to take an interest in irrelevant things than do nothing at all. To be circumspect, it's not enough to interfere; it's more important to make sure others don't interfere in your affairs. Don't so belong to others that you don't belong to yourself. Even friends should not be abused; you shouldn't want more from them than they're willing to concede. Any extreme is a vice, and especially in dealings with others. Sensible moderation is the best way to maintain goodwill and respect because ever-precious dignity won't be worn away. Be free in spirit, passionate about all that's fine, and never sin against your own good taste.

34:

Know your key quality, your outstanding gift. Cultivate it, and improve the rest. Everyone could have been pre-eminent in something, if they had been aware of their best quality. Identify your key attribute and redouble its use. In some this is their

judgement, in others courage. Most people misuse their capabilities, and so achieve superiority in nothing. What passion rushes to flatter, time is slow to disillusion us about.

35:

Think things through. And especially what's most important. All fools become lost through not thinking. They don't even imagine the half of things, and as they don't notice what's harmful or beneficial, they never diligently apply themselves. Some pay most attention to what matters little, and little attention to what matters most, always thinking in reverse. Many never lose their senses, having none to lose. There are things that ought to be observed with great care and kept firmly in our minds. The wise think everything through and delve especially into anything difficult and doubtful, and sometimes believe that there is more to something than they think. In this way, reflection reaches where perception cannot.

36:

Size up fortune, to know when to act and when to commit yourself. This is more important than observing your dominant humour, for if someone at forty asking Hippocrates for health is a fool, more so someone asking Seneca for good sense.[13] It's a great art to know how to govern fortune, whether waiting for it, for it can make you wait, or whilst enjoying it, for it can smile upon you – though you can never grasp its ways, so anomalous are its actions. Whoever

sees fortune smiling should proceed confidently, for it often favours the brave, and even, like a vivacious woman, the young. If you're unlucky, don't act, but withdraw and don't allow your misfortune to be doubled. But if you're in control of it, then press on.

37:

Recognize and know how to use insinuations. This is the most subtle part of human affairs. They are dropped to test minds and are a covert and penetrating way to probe the heart. Others are malicious, thrown out at random, tinged with envy and anointed with passion's poison, invisible lightning bolts that topple us from favour and respect. Whilst a whole conspiracy of public slander and private spite wasn't enough to rock them, many have fallen from a privileged but demeaning position of favour wounded by the slightest insinuation. In contrast, they can work in our favour, strengthening and confirming reputations. As deftly as ill will hurls them out, caution should catch them and vigilance expect them, because defence is based on knowledge, and a blow which is anticipated always fails.

38:

Quit whilst fortune is smiling, as all good gamblers do. A graceful retreat is as important as a brave assault, safeguarding achievements once these are enough, and especially when they're more than enough. Always be suspicious of unbroken good fortune;

far safer is fortune that's mixed, and for it to be bittersweet even whilst you are enjoying it. The more blessings there are rushing towards us, the greater the risk of them stumbling and bringing everything down. The intensity of fortune's favour sometimes compensates for the brevity of its duration. It quickly grows tired of carrying someone on its shoulders.

39:

Recognize things at their peak, at their best, and know how to take advantage of them. The works of nature all reach a peak of perfection: up to that point, a process of improvement; after it, decline. With works of art, few reach a point where they cannot be improved. It's the height of good taste to enjoy things at their most perfect. Not everyone can, and not all those who can know how to. Even the fruits of the understanding reach a point of full maturity. It's important to recognize it so as to appreciate and use it.

40:

Be in people's good graces. It's a great thing to earn people's admiration, but more so their affection. This is partly a matter of luck, but mostly of effort; it begins with the first and is pursued with the second. Outstanding talent is not enough, although people imagine that it's easy to win affection once respect has been won. For benevolence, beneficence is required. Do endless good; good words, better deeds; love, in order to be loved.[14] Courtesy is the

greatest, most politic spell the great can cast. Reach for great deeds first, then for the pen; go from the sword to sheets of paper, for the favour of writers, which exists, is eternal.

41:

Never exaggerate. Take great care not to speak in superlatives, whether to avoid offending truth or tarnishing your good sense. Exaggeration is an excess of esteem and indicates a lack of knowledge and taste. Praise arouses curiosity, goads desire, and if, as normally happens, true worth falls short of the initial evaluation, our expectation turns against the deception and gets even by scorning both the praiser and the praised. The wise take their time, then, and would rather understate than overstate. True greatness in things is rare; temper your esteem. Exaggeration is a form of lying; using it, you lose your reputation for having good taste, which is bad, and for being knowledgeable, which is worse.

42:

Natural command. It's superiority's secret strength. It should arise not from irritating artifice, but from innate authority. Everyone submits to it without knowing why, recognizing the secret force of inherent authority. Such noble geniuses are kings by merit, lions by innate privilege, and they capture hearts and even minds because of the respect they command. If they are blessed with other talents,

they were born to be prime movers in politics, since they achieve more with one hint than others with verbosity.

43:

Think with the few and speak with the many. To want to go against the current is as impossible for the wise as it is easy for the reckless. Only a Socrates could undertake this. Dissent is taken as an insult since it condemns another's judgement. Those offended multiply, either because of the point criticized or the person who'd endorsed it. Truth is for the few; deception is as common as it is vulgar. The wise cannot be identified by what they say in public, since they never speak there with their own voice but following common stupidity, however much their inner thoughts contradict this. The sensible flee being contradicted as much as contradicting: what they're quick to censure, they're slow to publicize. Thought is free; it cannot and should not be coerced. It retreats into the sanctuary of silence, and if it sometimes breaks this, it only does so among the select and the wise.

44:

Affinity with great men. To have an affinity with heroes is a sign of being one. Such an affinity, being hidden and advantageous, is one of nature's wonders. There are connections between hearts and temperaments, and the ignorant attribute their effects to magic. Such sympathy does not stop at esteem, but extends to goodwill,

and even to affection. It persuades without words and achieves things without reward. There is active sympathy and passive sympathy; the more sublime these are, the greater the happiness they bring. It's a great skill to recognize, distinguish and know how to attain both, for no amount of persistence is enough without this secret favour.

45:

Caution – use it, but don't abuse it. Don't affect it, far less reveal it: all art should be concealed, for it's suspect, and especially the art of caution, which is odious. Deceit is widely used; suspicion should be everywhere but without revealing itself, for this would occasion distrust: it causes affront, provokes revenge, and arouses unimagined troubles. Reflective behaviour is of great advantage to our deeds: there is no greater proof of reason. An action's absolute perfection is secured by the mastery with which it is executed.

46:

Conquer your aversions. We usually hate people without reason, often even prejudging them. And sometimes this innate and vulgar aversion is directed at eminent men. Good sense should correct it, for there is nothing more discreditable than loathing the best. Just as affinity with heroes shows superiority, so antipathy towards them is dishonourable.

47:

Avoid getting embroiled. This is one of the first concerns of prudence. The most able always keep their distance from extreme difficulties. There is a great distance between one extreme and another, and with their good sense they are always found midway between the two. They take their time to commit themselves, for it's easier to avoid a dangerous situation than to emerge well from one. Our judgement is always tempted to get embroiled, and it's safer to flee such temptation than to overcome it. One difficulty leads to another, and soon you're on the brink of failure. There are people, troublesome by temperament or nationality, who are quick to get involved, but whoever walks in the light of reason is always alert to difficulty. Such people think it more courageous not to get embroiled in difficulty than to conquer it, and, as there is always one meddling fool, they decline to double the number.

48:

Real depths make a true person. The interior should be that much better than the exterior in everything. There are individuals who are all façade, like houses left unfinished because the money ran out. They have the entrance of a palace and the interior of a shack. There's nowhere to find rest, or everything comes to a rest because, after the opening greeting, conversation ends. They trot through the initial courtesies like Sicilian horses, and then they seem to take a vow of silence, for words are quickly exhausted when there are no

lasting thoughts. Such people easily deceive those who only consider things superficially, but not the astute who, because they look beneath the surface, find them completely hollow, a fable for the discreet.[15]

49:

A judicious and observant person. Such people master things, things don't master them. They plumb the greatest depth and know how to dissect perfectly the talents of every individual. As soon as they see someone, they understand and evaluate their very essence.[16] Uniquely perceptive, they can decipher even the most cautious person's inner self. They observe acutely, understand subtly and infer judiciously: they discover, notice, grasp and understand everything.

50:

Never lose your self-respect. Even when alone, don't be too lax with yourself. Let your own integrity be the measure of your rectitude; owe more to the severity of your own opinion than to external rules. Stop yourself doing something improper more through fear of your own good sense than of some stern external authority. Stand in fear of yourself and you will have no need of Seneca's imaginary tutor.[17]

51:

Choose well. Most things depend on it. It presupposes good taste and absolutely impartial judgement; study and ingenuity are not enough. There's no perfection where there's no selection. This has two benefits: to be able to choose, and to choose the best. Many who have fertile and subtle intellects and acute judgement, and who are studious and informed, are lost when it comes to choosing. They always choose the worst, as if they preferred getting things wrong. It's one of the greatest gifts from above.

52:

Never lose your composure. A prime aim of good sense: never lose your cool. This is proof of true character, of a perfect heart, because magnanimity is difficult to perturb. Passions are the humours of the mind and any imbalance in them unsettles good sense, and if this illness leads us to open our mouths, it will endanger our reputation. Be so in control of yourself that, whether things are going well or badly, nobody can accuse you of being perturbed and all can admire your superiority.

53:

Diligent and intelligent. Diligence carries out quickly what intelligence decides upon slowly. Fools love haste; since they never see any difficulty, they act without reflecting. In contrast, the wise are often too unhurried, for scrutiny gives rise to reflection. The ineffectiveness caused by delay can ruin the accuracy of any

judgement. Promptness is the mother of good fortune. He who left nothing until tomorrow achieved many things.[18] An august motto: make haste slowly.[19]

54:

Show your mettle, but wisely. Even cowardly hares tug on a dead lion's mane. There's no messing around with courage; if it gives in at the first obstacle, it will give in at every subsequent one; the same difficulty will have to be overcome, so better now than later. The spirit's valour surpasses the body's; sheathed in good sense, always ready for action like a sword. It's a person's defence. A weak spirit causes more harm than a weak body. Many have outstanding talents, but lacking such verve, they appear dead, buried in their own lethargy. Not without foresight, nature combined in the bee the sweetness of its honey with the sharpness of its sting. The body has nerves and bones; don't let the spirit be spineless.

55:

Bide your time. It indicates a great heart and profound patience. Don't be too hasty or too vehement. First master yourself and then you will master others. You must journey through the tracts of time to the centre of opportunity. Prudent delay allows success to ripen and secrets to mature. Time's crutch is more effective than Hercules' nail-studded club. God himself punishes not with the rod, but at the

opportune moment. A great saying: ‘Time and I against any other two’. Fortune rewards patience with a truly great prize.

56:

Quick and impulsive actions. They arise from a fortunate sharpness of mind which, due to its quickness and brilliance, knows no tight spot or unforeseen difficulty. Some reflect at length only then to get it all wrong; others get it right without any prior reflection. There are some who embody antiperistasis:[20] they work best in the face of opposition. They are usually monstrous prodigies who succeed in everything when they act impulsively, and in nothing when they think things through. What doesn’t occur to them on the spot never will, and there are no second thoughts. Quick-acting people are praised because their actions suggest they are prodigiously gifted, revealing subtlety in their thoughts, good sense in their actions.

57:

Those who think things through are more secure. Quickly enough done, if well done. What’s done swiftly, will be swiftly undone, but what’s to last an eternity, must take an eternity. Only perfection is noted, for success alone endures. A truly deep mind achieves eternity. What’s worth a lot, costs a lot; the most precious of metals is the slowest to melt and the heaviest.

58:

Know how to adapt yourself. You don't need to appear equally intelligent to all, nor should you employ more effort than is necessary. With knowledge and excellence, nothing should be squandered. A good falconer releases only as many birds as are needed for the chase. Don't continually flaunt your qualities or there'll be nothing left to admire. There must always be something novel with which to dazzle, for people who reveal something new each day keep interest alive and never allow the limits of their great abilities to be discovered.

59:

Leave a good impression. In the house of Fortune, if you enter through pleasure's door, you'll leave through sorrow's, and vice versa. Pay attention to how things end, then, taking greater care to make a good exit than a widely applauded entrance.[21] It's common for lucky people to have very favourable beginnings and truly tragic ends. The aim is not to have your entrance applauded by the rabble, for everyone's is greeted this way. What matters rather is the general feeling your exit arouses, for few are missed once gone. Good fortune rarely accompanies those on their way out; she is as polite to those who are arriving as she is rude to those who are leaving.

60:

Good judgement. Some are born prudent. They enter into the world with the advantage of wisdom's innate moral sense[22] and are therefore already halfway to success. With age and experience their reason comes to full maturity and they achieve a well-balanced judgement. They detest passing ideas as whims which tempt good sense, especially in matters of state which, given their importance, require complete assurance. Such individuals deserve to be at the helm, either directly or as advisers.

61:

Eminence in what's best: an extreme rarity among the profusion of perfections. There can be no hero without some sublime quality; mediocrity is never the object of applause. Eminence in an important occupation saves you from common ordinariness and raises you to the ranks of the outstanding. To be eminent in an ordinary profession is to be something in little; the more enjoyable something is, the less glorious it is. Excellence in superior affairs is a mark of sovereignty: it arouses admiration and wins affection.

62:

Work with good tools. Some want the mediocrity of the tools they work with to be evidence of their own extreme subtlety. A dangerous sort of satisfaction, deserving of a terrible punishment. The worthiness of a minister never diminishes the greatness of their superior. Rather, all the credit for success falls to its ultimate

source, and equally all the blame for failure. Fame always focuses on superiors. It never says, ‘That person had good or bad ministers’, only ‘That person was a good or bad maker of men’. Choose your people and try them out, for your reputation’s immortality will be entrusted to them.

63:

The excellence of being first. And if in something eminent, doubly so. When things are evenly matched, it’s a great advantage to get in first. Many would have been a phoenix in their own sphere if others had not got there first. Fame is entailed,[23] and the first born acquire it all; for those who come second, there’s nothing but disputes over leftovers, and however hard their efforts, the vulgar impression of imitation cannot be dispelled. Prodigies have always subtly invented new ways of achieving eminence – so long as good sense first underwrites such undertakings. The wise make a place for themselves in the annals of the great by the novelty of their endeavours. Some would rather be first at something second-rate, than second at something first-rate.

64:

Know how to avoid giving yourself grief. It makes good sense and is advantageous to escape upset. Prudence saves you from much: it is the Lucina[24] of good fortune and thus of happiness. Never give bad news, far less receive it. You should bar your doors against it,

unless it brings some relief. Some people's hearing is ruined through hearing nothing but sweetness in flattery; others, nothing but bitterness in gossip; and there are people who don't know how to live without a daily dose of unpleasantness, as Mithridates didn't without his of poison.[25] Nor is it a rule of self-preservation to want to take on a lifelong problem just to please someone else, even someone close to you. You should never sin against your own happiness simply to please someone who gives advice but stands detached. In all things, whenever pleasing someone else runs up against causing you grief, an advantageous lesson is to know that it's better to cause them upset now than yourself upset later when things are irremediable.

65:

Outstanding good taste. Like ingenuity, it can be cultivated. Excellent understanding heightens desire's appetite and thus the enjoyment of possession. The loftiness of someone's taste reveals the extent of their talent. Only a great subject is enough to satisfy great ability; just as large bites are for large appetites, so sublime subjects are for sublime personalities. The loftiest material stands in fear of discerning taste, and the most perfect loses its confidence. Truly great ability is rare, so appreciation should be sparing. Taste is acquired through interaction with others and secured through continual use: it's a real stroke of luck to come into contact with someone with perfect taste. But you shouldn't make a habit of

disliking everything. This is to take things to a stupid extreme, and is more detestable when due to affectation than to natural disposition. Some want God to create another world and other perfections to satisfy their extravagant imagination.

66:

Make sure of a successful outcome. Some focus more on going about things the right way than on achieving their goal. But the discredit that comes with failure outweighs any credit gained by such diligence. Whoever wins need offer no explanations.[26] Most people don't see the precise circumstances, only a good or bad outcome. Reputation is therefore never lost when goals are achieved. A successful conclusion makes everything golden, however mistaken the means.[27] For it shows wisdom to go against received wisdom when there's no other way to achieve a happy outcome.

67:

Choose occupations that win praise. Most things depend on satisfying others. Esteem is to perfection what Favonius[28] is to flowers: breath and life. There are occupations open to universal acclaim and others, often greater ones, completely invisible to it. The former, since undertaken in the sight of all, gain everyone's goodwill; the latter, although superior and more select, remain secret and unnoticed, admired but not acclaimed. Among princes, those victorious are the most celebrated, and therefore the kings of

Aragon won praise for being warriors, conquerors and magnanimous.[29] A great man should prefer celebrated occupations that all can see and share. He may then be immortalized through common acclaim.

68:

Make others understand. This is superior to making them remember, understanding being better than memory. Sometimes you have to remind them, other times advise them. Some people don't do things that are ripe to be done because it doesn't occur to them to do so. Friendly advice should then help them see the advantages. One of the greatest things about the mind is that it grasps what matters. Much success remains unrealized for want of this. Let the person with insight spread it, and the person lacking it, seek it out, the former carefully, the latter discreetly, simply creating an opportunity for this. Such subtlety is necessary when the interests of the person providing the insight are involved. When this is not enough, show tact and be more explicit: having received a 'no', go skilfully after a 'yes', for more often than not, something is not obtained because there's no attempt to obtain it.

69:

Don't give in to vulgar humours. A great person is one who never yields to passing fancies. It's sound advice to reflect upon yourself, to know and anticipate your actual disposition, and even to move

towards the other extreme so as to obtain that balance between nature and art required by our moral sense.[30] Self-knowledge is the start of self-correction. For there are monsters of incongruity who are always in the grip of one of the humours, their emotions varying accordingly. Forever dragged along by this vulgar disarray, they are mired in contradiction. Such excess corrupts not only their will, but their judgement, distorting both desire and understanding.

70:

Know how to refuse. Not everything has to be granted, nor to everyone. This is as important as knowing how to grant something, and is a vital necessity for rulers. Your manner is important here: one person's 'no' is valued more than another's 'yes', because a gilded 'no' satisfies far more than a blunt 'yes'. Many are always ready to say 'no', turning everything sour. 'No' is always their first reaction, and although they subsequently grant everything, they are not held in esteem because of the taste left by the initial refusal. Things shouldn't be refused in one fell swoop; let disappointment sink in gradually. Nor should refusals be categoric, for dependants then give up all hope. Always let there be a few crumbs of hope to temper the bitterness of refusal. Let courtesy make up for the lack of favour, and fine words the lack of deeds. 'Yes' and 'no' are quick to say, and require much thought.[31]

71:

Don't be uneven, or inconsistent in your actions: either through inclination or choice. The sensible man is always the same in all areas of perfection, this being a mark of intelligence. He should change only because the causes and merits of the situation do. Where good sense is concerned, variety is ugly. There are some who are different every day; uneven in their understanding, more so in their will, and even in their luck. What they approved of yesterday, they disapprove of today, forever negating their own reputation and confounding others' opinion of them.

72:

A resolute person. Poor execution is less harmful than irresolution. Things deteriorate less when they are in motion than when they stand still. There are indecisive people who always need a push from someone. And often the indecision arises not so much from perplexity, for their judgement is keen, as from inertia. To raise difficulties is usually seen as ingenious, but more so to find ways round them. Others of great and resolute judgement let nothing hamper them. They were born for great tasks because their clear understanding facilitates prompt action and success. Everything is immediately done and dusted, and having cleared up one world,[32] they have time left for another. When such people are backed up by good fortune, they press on with greater confidence.

73:

Know how to be evasive. This is the escape route of sensible people. With the charm of a witty phrase, they can normally extricate themselves from the most intricate labyrinth. They can avoid the most difficult confrontation with a smile: the courage of the greatest of the great captains was based on this.[33] A polite tactic in refusing is to change the subject, and there's no greater act of caution than to conceal that you have understood.

74:

Don't be impossible to deal with. Truly wild animals are to be found in the most populated places. Inaccessibility is the vice of those with no self-knowledge whose character changes with the honours they receive. To start off by offending people is not the right way to esteem. What a sight one of these impossible monsters is, always on the point of inappropriate ferocity! Their unfortunate subordinates go in to talk to them as if to fight tigers, armed with as much wariness as apprehension. To rise to the top they pleased everyone; once there, they want to get even by annoying everyone. Their position means they have to be accessible to many, but their asperity or arrogance makes them accessible to none. A polite punishment is to leave them to themselves, depriving them of the good sense that interaction brings.

75:

Choose a heroic model, more to emulate than to imitate. There are examples of greatness, living texts of renown. Select the best in your own area, not so much to follow as to surpass. Alexander wept, not for Achilles in his tomb, but for himself, not yet risen to universal fame.[34] Nothing so incites ambition within the spirit as the trumpeting of another's fame: it demolishes envy and inspires noble actions.

76:

Don't always be joking. Prudence is known by its seriousness, which is more highly regarded than wit. The person who is always joking is never taken seriously. We treat such people the same as liars in never believing them, in the one case suspicious of lies, in the other, of jokes. You never know when such people are talking sense, which is the same as having none. There is nothing worse than endless repartee. Some gain a reputation for being ready wits, and so lose any for being sensible. Fun must have its place, but seriousness must dominate.

77:

Know how to be all things to all people.[35] A discreet Proteus:[36] with the learned, learned, and with the devout, devout. A great art to win everyone over, since similarity creates goodwill. Observe each person's temperament and tune yours to it. Whether with a serious or a jovial person, go with the current, undergoing a transformation

that is politic – and essential for those in positions of dependency. Such vital subtlety requires great ability. It is less difficult for the universal man with his wide-ranging intellect and taste.

78:

Skill in embarking on something. Folly always rushes in, for all fools are audacious. Their very simplicity, which prevents them from noticing difficulties at the outset, makes them subsequently indifferent to rebuffs. But good sense undertakes things extremely carefully; vigilance and caution scout ahead so it can move forward without danger. Discretion sentences all impetuosity to failure, although fortune may grant it a reprieve. It's best to proceed slowly when hidden depths are feared: let shrewdness test things out and prudence gain firmer ground. There are extensive shoals in human affairs these days – it is advisable to take constant soundings.

79:

A genial temperament. In moderation, this is a good quality, not a defect. A dash of wit seasons everything. The greatest people play wit's card, which wins universal favour, but always with good sense and subject to decorum. Others use a joke as the quickest way out of a tight spot, for there are things that should be taken in jest, sometimes the things another takes more seriously. It indicates an even temper and wins hearts over.

80:

Take care when gathering information. We live mainly on information. We see very little for ourselves and live on others' testimony. Hearing is truth's last entry point, and a lie's first. Truth is normally seen and rarely heard. It rarely reaches us unadulterated, especially when it comes from far off. It is always tinged with the emotions through which it has passed. Passion tints everything it touches, making it odious or pleasing. It always tries to make an impression, so consider carefully a person offering praise, and even more so someone uttering abuse. The greatest attention is needed here to discover their intention by knowing beforehand where they're coming from. Let caution weigh up what's missing and what's false.

81:

Dazzle anew. This is the privilege of the phoenix. Excellence normally grows old, and with it fame. Custom diminishes admiration, and mediocre novelty usually trumps aged pre-eminence. Valour, ingenuity, fortune, indeed everything, should be reborn. Dare to dazzle anew, rising repeatedly like the sun, shining in different fields, so that your absence in one area awakens desire and your novel appearance in another, applause.

82:

Take neither the good nor the bad to extremes. A sage reduced the whole of wisdom to 'moderation in all things'.[37] Extreme justice becomes unjust;[38] an orange squeezed too hard leads to bitter juice. Even pleasure should never be taken to extremes. Ingenuity itself is drained if pushed too hard, and milking to excess will draw blood.

83:

Allow yourself some minor slip. For carelessness is usually the best endorsement of your qualities. Envy has its own form of ostracism, the more popular, the more criminal. It accuses something truly perfect of sinning in not sinning and condemns it completely for being completely perfect. It becomes Argos[39] in seeking flaws in what's good, if only for its own consolation. Criticism, like lightning, strikes the highest peaks. So let Homer nod[40] from time to time, and affect some lapse of ingenuity or courage, but never of good sense, to quieten ill will so its poison isn't spat out. This is like distracting the bull of envy with a cape to safeguard your own immortality.

84:

Know how to use your enemies. You must know how to take hold of everything – not by the blade, which wounds, but by the hilt, which defends. This applies especially to envy. Enemies are of more use to the wise man than friends are to the fool. Ill will usually levels mountains of difficulty which goodwill would balk at tackling. The

greatness of many has been fashioned thanks to malicious enemies. Flattery is more harmful than hatred, for the latter is an effective remedy for the flaws that the former conceals. Sensible people fashion a mirror from spite, more truthful than that of affection, and reduce or correct their defects, for great caution is needed when living on the frontier of envy and ill will.

85:

Don't be the wild card. The flaw with any excellent talent is that its frequent use amounts to abuse; precisely because coveted by everyone, it ends up annoying everyone. It's a great misfortune to be good at nothing; no less wanting to be good at everything. Such people lose through winning so much, ending up as much hated as they were initially desired. When the same such individuals are encountered in every field of excellence, they lose their initial reputation as exceptional and are scorned as simply common. The only solution for anyone of exceptional gifts is to exercise moderation in showing them: an excess of excellence, but moderation in displaying it. The stronger a torch shines, the more it burns itself up and the less time it lasts. Scarcity of appearance is rewarded with real esteem.

86:

Forestall malicious gossip. The mob is many-headed, with many malicious eyes and many slanderous tongues. Sometimes a rumour

tarnishing the best reputation spreads through it, and if this results in your becoming a byword, it will destroy your name. The basis for this is normally some obvious defect, some ridiculous shortcomings, which are popular material for gossip. There are flaws secretly exposed by private envy to public malice, for there are malevolent tongues that destroy a great reputation more quickly with a joke than with open effrontery. It's very easy to gain a bad reputation, for badness is easy to believe and hard to erase. The sensible man should avoid such things and carefully forestall the insolence of the mob, for prevention is easier than cure.

87:

Culture and refinement. Each individual is born a barbarian, and is saved from being a beast by acquiring culture. Culture creates a true person; the more of it, the greater the person. Because of this, Greece called the rest of the universe barbarous. Ignorance is extremely coarse. Nothing civilizes us more than knowledge, but even wisdom itself is coarse if left unrefined. Not only should our understanding be refined but also our will, and especially our conversation. There are people who are naturally refined inside and out, in thought and word, in the adornment of their bodies – the outer shell – and the qualities of their souls – the kernel. Others, in contrast, are so coarse that an intolerable, barbarous roughness tarnishes everything about them, often even their best qualities.

88:

Let your manner be lofty, endeavour to make it sublime. A great man's conduct should not be petty. You should never go into minute details, especially with unpleasant things, because although it's an advantage to notice everything casually, it isn't to want to inquire into every last thing. You should normally act with a noble generality, which is a form of gallantry. A large part of ruling is dissimulation;[41] you should pass over most things that occur among your family, your friends and particularly your enemies. Triviality is annoying, and in a person's character, tedious. To keep coming back to a disagreement is a kind of mania. Normally, each person's behaviour follows their heart and their talents.

89:

Understand yourself: your temperament, intellect, opinions, emotions. You can't be master of yourself if you don't first understand yourself. There are mirrors for the face, but none for the spirit: let discreet self-reflection be yours. And when you cease to care about your external image, focus on the inner one to correct and improve it. Know how strong your good sense and perspicacity are for any undertaking and evaluate your capacity for overcoming obstacles. Fathom your depths and weigh up your capacity for all things.

90:

The art of living long: live well. Two things quickly end life: stupidity or infamy. Some lose it through not knowing how to keep it, others through not wanting to. Just as virtue is its own reward,[42] so vice is its own punishment. Whoever is quick to turn to vice quickly dies a double death; whoever turns with alacrity to virtue never dies. The spirit's integrity is passed on to the body, and a good life is held to be a long life not only through its intensity but through its very extension.[43]

91:

Only act if prudence has no doubts. The thought of error in the mind of anyone carrying something out is clear to anyone watching, especially to a rival. If judgement hesitates in the heat of the moment, once things have cooled down it will condemn you for utter stupidity. When prudence has its doubts, actions are dangerous; it would be better not to act at all. Good sense does not accept probabilities; it always walks in the midday light of reason. How can an undertaking end well when even at the start there are misgivings? And if a decision which seems first-class in your mind can turn out badly, what hope for one which at the outset causes reason to hesitate and judgement to predict the worst?

92:

Exceptional sense, in everything, I say. It's the first and principal rule of conduct and speech, especially necessary the greater or higher

your position. An ounce of good sense is worth a pound of subtlety. It's a sure path, although often not to praise, even though a reputation for sense is the crowning triumph of fame. It will suffice to please the wise, whose opinion is the touchstone of success.

93:

A universal person. Having every perfection, such an individual is worth many others put together and makes life a complete joy, passing this on to their friends. Variety joined with perfection makes life a delight. It is a great art knowing how to enjoy all that's good. And since, given their pre-eminence, nature made humans the compendium of the natural world, let art make each a universe through the exercise and cultivation of taste and understanding.

94:

Unfathomable abilities. The circumspect man, if he wants to be venerated by everyone, should prevent the true depths of his knowledge or his courage being plumbed. He should allow himself to be known, but not fully understood. No one should establish the limits of his abilities, because of the danger of having their illusions shattered. He should never allow anyone to grasp everything about him. Greater veneration is created by conjecture and uncertainty over the extent of our ability than by firm evidence of this, however vast it might be.

95:

Know how to maintain expectation: continually stoke it. Let much promise more and a great action lead to expectations of even greater ones. Not everything has to be staked on the first throw: a great tactic is to be moderate in your use of strength and knowledge, and gradually to move forward towards success.

96:

On moral sense.[44] It is the throne of reason, the foundation of prudence, and with it, success is easy. It's heaven's gift – the most wished for, because the greatest and the best. The most important piece of armour, so vital it's the only one whose absence is called a loss. Its lack is always noted first. All life's actions depend on its influence, and all seek its approval, for everything must be carried out with common sense. It consists of an innate propensity for all that most conforms to reason, and is always wedded to what's most right.

97:

Make and keep your reputation. It is on loan to us from fame. It's hard to acquire since it comes from greatness, which is as rare as mediocrity is common. Once made, it's easy to preserve. It creates many obligations and achieves many things. When it turns into veneration due to the nobility of its origin and its field of action, it

is a kind of majesty, though any reputation of true substance has always been valued.

98:

Conceal your wishes. Passions are breaches in the mind. The most practical kind of knowledge is dissimulation; whoever plays their hand openly runs the risk of losing. Let the reserve of the cautious compete against the scrutiny of the perceptive; against the sharp eyes of the lynx, the ink of the cuttlefish. Don't let your desires be known so that they won't be anticipated, either by opposition or flattery.

99:

Reality and appearance. Things don't pass for what they are, but for how they appear. Few look within, and many are content with appearances. It's not enough to be right if your face looks wrong.

100:

A man free from illusion: a wise Christian, a worldly philosopher. But don't look like one, far less pretend to be one. Philosophy is discredited, although the highest activity of the wise. The knowledge of sages is now without authority. Seneca introduced it into Rome; it survived amidst the elite for a while; and is now

deemed irrelevant. But disillusion has always been the nourishment of prudence, the delight of integrity.

101:

Half the world is laughing at the other half, and all are fools. Either everything is good or everything bad, depending on people's opinions. What one pursues, another flees. Whoever wants to make their own opinion the measure of all things is an insufferable fool. Perfection doesn't depend on one person's approval: tastes are as plentiful as faces, and as varied. There's not a single failing without its advocate. Nor should we lose heart if something doesn't please someone, for there'll always be someone else it does. But their applause shouldn't go to our heads, for others will condemn such praise. The measure of true satisfaction is the approval of reputable men who are experts in the relevant field. Life doesn't depend on any one opinion, any one custom, or any one century.

102:

A stomach for great mouthfuls of good fortune. In the body of prudence, not the least important part is a large stomach, for great ability is made up of great parts. A stroke of good luck doesn't hold back someone who deserves something more substantial: what satiates one person, leaves another hungry. There are many who waste a choice morsel because they don't have the appetite for it, being neither accustomed nor born to elevated positions. Their

dealings turn sour, and the heady perfume of unmerited honour makes them lose their heads. They run real risks in high places and are full of themselves because they have no place for luck. Great men should let it be seen that they still have room for even greater things and should carefully shun anything that might indicate they are narrow-hearted.

103:

Each with the dignity proper to their status. Let all your actions, though not of a king, be worthy of one, as appropriate to your station. Regal conduct, within the limits of your lot: grandeur in your actions, loftiness in your thoughts. In all things resemble a king, in merit, if not in reality, for true sovereignty lies in integrity of behaviour, and you'll never need to envy greatness if you can become its measure. In particular, something of true excellence should rub off on those close to the throne. They should share the qualities of majesty, not the ceremonies of vanity, striving for the perfection of substance, not the imperfection of pomp.

104:

Understand what different jobs entail. They are all different and you need great knowledge and observation here. Some require courage, others subtlety. Those that depend on integrity are easier to handle, those on artifice, harder. With the right disposition, nothing else is needed for the former; but all the care and vigilance in the world

are not enough for the latter. To govern people is a demanding job, and fools and madmen more so. Twice the wit is needed to deal with someone with none. A job that demands complete dedication, has fixed hours and is repetitive is intolerable; better is one which is free from boredom and which combines variety and importance, because change is refreshing. The best are those where dependency on others is minimal. The worst, one where you are held to account, both in this world and the next.

105:

Don't be tedious. People with only one concern and only one subject are usually boring. Brevity flatters and opens more doors: it gains in courtesy what it loses in concision. What's good, if brief, is twice as good. Even bad things, if brief, are not so bad. Paring things down to their essence achieves more than verbosity. It's a commonplace that a tall person is rarely wise – not so much long-legged, as long-winded. There are those who, rather than embellish the world, are mere obstacles, worthless ornaments shunned by all. The discreet person should avoid being a hindrance, especially to the most powerful who are always very busy; worse to annoy one of them than the rest of the world. What's well said, is quickly said.

106:

Don't vaunt your good fortune. It is more offensive to flaunt your position than yourself. To play the important person is detestable;

it's enough to be envied. The more you look for esteem, the less you will have. It depends on another's respect, and so you can't simply take it, but must earn it and wait for it from others. High positions require the right amount of authority, and without this they cannot be properly carried out. Maintain the authority required to fulfil your duties; don't exhaust this, bolster it. All who play the great person in their job show they don't merit it and aren't up to it. If you want recognition, let it be for your excellent qualities, not for incidental trappings, for even a king should be venerated more for his person than his position.

107:

Don't appear self-satisfied. Live neither discontented, which reveals faint-heartedness, nor satisfied, which reveals stupidity. In most people, satisfaction is born of ignorance and ends in foolish happiness which, although pleasurable, quickly diminishes a person's reputation. Unable to grasp the true perfection of others, it settles for its own vulgar mediocrity. Misgivings are useful as well as sensible, either to safeguard things turning out well, or to console you when they turn out badly, for a misfortune is nothing new to someone who has already feared it. Homer nodded at times, and Alexander lost his position and his illusions.[45] Things depend on many circumstances, and what triumphs on one occasion, fails on another. But stupidity's incorrigibility lies in the fact that its most

groundless self-satisfaction flowers and its seeds sprout up everywhere.

108:

A short cut to being a true person: know how to rub shoulders with others. Interaction is very effective: custom and taste can be learnt, character and even ingenuity can rub off on you without your knowing. Let the impulsive get together with those who are restrained, and similarly other opposite temperaments. In this way, a proper balance will be effortlessly achieved. To know how to accommodate is a great skill. The alternation of opposites beautifies and sustains creation, and if it creates harmony in the natural world, even more so in the moral sphere. Make use of this politic advice when choosing friends and helpers, for from such communication between extremes, a discreet balance will be achieved.

109:

Don't be condemnatory. There are individuals, naturally cruel, who turn everything into a crime, not in a moment of passion, but by their nature. They condemn everyone, some for what they have done, others for what they will do. This reveals a worse than cruel spirit, which is despicable, and they make such exaggerated accusations that they turn a mote into a beam,[46] and gouge your eyes out with it. In any task, they are slave-drivers, turning what might have been a paradise into a hell. And if their passions become

involved, they take everything to extremes. In contrast, generosity finds an excuse – whether good intention or oversight – for everything.

110:

Don't hang around to be a setting sun. The sensible person's maxim: abandon things before they abandon you. Know how to turn an ending into a triumph. Sometimes the sun itself, whilst still shining brilliantly, goes behind a cloud so nobody can see it setting, leaving people in suspense over whether it has or not. To avoid being slighted, avoid being seen to decline. Don't wait until everyone turns their back on you, burying you alive to regret but dead to esteem. Someone sharp retires a racehorse at the right time, not waiting until everyone laughs when it falls in mid-race. Let beauty astutely shatter her mirror when the time is right, not impatiently and too late when she sees her own illusions shattered in it.

111:

Have friends. They are a second self. To a friend, another friend is always good and wise; between friends, everything turns out well. You are worth as much as others say you are, and to win their good words, win their hearts. Performing a service for another works like a charm, and the best way to win friends is to do people favours. The greatest and the best that we have depends on others. You must live with either friends or enemies. You should make a new friend

every day, if not a confidant, then at least a supporter, for if you have chosen well, some will later become confidants.

112:

Win affection. Even the first and highest Cause, in its most important affairs, foresees this need and works towards it. Win someone's affection and their respect will follow. Some so trust merit that they underestimate diligence. But caution knows full well that without people's favour, merit alone is the longest route to take. Goodwill facilitates everything and makes good all deficiencies. It doesn't always take certain qualities – like courage, integrity, wisdom and even discretion – for granted, but will grant them. It never sees faults because it doesn't want to. It usually arises from some material connection, whether temperament, race, family, nationality or employment, or from a more sublime, intangible one, such as talent, duty, reputation or merit. The difficulty lies in gaining it, for it's easy to preserve. You can diligently acquire it and learn how to profit from it.

113:

In good fortune prepare for bad. It's sensible to make provision for winter in the summer, and far easier. Favours are cheap then, and friends abundant. It's good to store things up against bad times, for adversity is costly and in need of everything. Have friends and grateful people set aside, for some day you will appreciate what

you barely notice now. Villainy never has any friends, disowning them in prosperity, and in adversity being disowned.

114:

Never compete. When aspiration meets opposition reputation is damaged. The competition will immediately set out to tarnish and discredit. Few fight clean. Rivalry uncovers the defects which politeness passes over. Many are held in high esteem whilst they have no rivals. The heat of opposition revives and resuscitates long-dead infamies and unearths the stench of past errors. Competition begins by bringing faults to light by any means it can, fair or foul. And although causing offence is not usually an expedient weapon, it does so for the vile satisfaction of revenge which shakes the dust of oblivion from discreditable actions. Benevolence has always been peaceable, and good reputation benevolent.

115:

Get used to the bad temperaments of those you deal with, like getting used to ugly faces. This is advisable in situations of dependency. There are horrible people you can neither live with nor live without. It's a necessary skill, therefore, to get used to them, as to ugliness, so you're not surprised each time their harshness manifests itself. At first they'll frighten you, but gradually your initial horror will disappear and caution will anticipate or tolerate the unpleasantness.

116:

Always deal with upstanding people. You can put them under an obligation and be under one with them. Their very rectitude is the best guarantee of their behaviour, even in disagreements, for they act as the people they are. Better to fight with honest people than triumph over bad ones. There is no honest dealing with the dishonest since they feel under no obligation to integrity. This is why there's no true friendship among such people, nor is their courtesy genuine, although it may seem so, because it's not rooted in honour. Shun entirely someone without honour, for the person who doesn't value honour, doesn't value virtue. And honour is the throne of integrity.

117:

Never talk about yourself. You'll either have to praise yourself, which is vain, or censure yourself, which is weak. It reveals a lack of good sense in the speaker and annoys the listener. This should be avoided among friends, and even more so in the highest positions where all speech is public and any appearance of stupidity is taken as stupidity itself. The same lack of good sense is evident in talking about people who are present due to the danger of foundering on one of two reefs, praise or blame.

118:

Gain a reputation for courtesy. This is enough to win you praise. Courtesy is the key part of culture, a kind of enchantment, and as such wins everyone's favour, just as discourtesy wins universal contempt and annoyance. If discourtesy arises from pride, it's detestable; if from ill manners, despicable. Too much courtesy is better than too little, but not always the same amount, which would lead to injustice. It's obligatory even between enemies so their true worth can be seen. It costs little and is worth a lot: a person who honours another is always honoured. Politeness and honour have this advantage: the former redounds on whoever shows it, the latter on whoever bestows it.

119:

Don't make yourself disliked. Don't provoke aversion, for this comes soon enough without being sought. Many people detest something for no reason, without knowing how or why. Ill will forestalls any sense of obligation. Those passions that are more certain to cause harm kick in before those that might bring some benefit. Some people are eager to be disliked by everyone, being either irritating or irritated. And once hatred gets hold of them, it is, like a bad reputation, difficult to shake off. They fear judicious people, detest slanderers, loathe the vain, abhor busybodies, and leave those who are remarkable alone. Show respect, therefore, in order to be respected. To flourish, flatter people with attention.

120:

Live according to common practice. Even knowledge must keep in fashion; when it's not, you need to know how to appear ignorant. Reasoning and taste change with the times. You shouldn't reason and debate in an old-fashioned way and your taste should be up-to-the-minute. The preference of the majority sets the standard in all things. Follow it whilst it lasts, and move towards eminence. A sensible person must adapt the trappings of both body and soul to the fashion of the times, even if the past seems better. Only in matters of goodness does this rule of life not apply, for you should always practise virtue. Telling the truth and keeping your word are unknown today and seem like things from the past. Good men, though always loved, seem relics of better times, and so even if there happen to be any, they're not emulated because they're not in fashion. The misfortune of your century, that virtue is taken as unusual and malice as the norm! Let those with discretion live as they can, if not as they would prefer, and consider what fortune has given them to be better than what it has denied.

121:

Don't make a great deal over nothing. Just as some people make light of everything, others make a great deal. They talk self-importantly and take things seriously, turning everything into a debate and a mystery. Few annoying matters have to be taken seriously; to do so is a needless undertaking. To take things to heart that you should

turn your back on is to go about things the wrong way. Many things that seemed significant were not when left alone, and others that were not became so by having attention paid to them. To put an end to something is simple right at the start, but afterwards, not at all. Often the cure is what causes the illness. To let things be is not the least of life's rules.

122:

Mastery in words and deeds. It wins great esteem everywhere and gains respect in advance. Its influence is felt in everything: our conversation, public speaking, and even our movement, gaze and desire. To capture the hearts of others is a great victory. Such mastery doesn't come from foolish boldness or irritating delay, but from dignified authority born of a superior character and supported by merit.

123:

A person without affectation. The more talents, the less affectation, which tends to be a vulgar stain on all talents. Affectation is as annoying to others as it is burdensome to the person displaying it, for such a person is a martyr to anxiety, tormented by punctiliousness. Even great qualities are diminished by affectation because they are believed to be forced and artificial, not spontaneous and natural, and everything natural has always been more pleasing than anything artificial. The affected are held to be

strangers to what they affect. The better you do something, the more you should conceal the effort involved so that it seems that perfection comes naturally. Nor, in avoiding affectation, should you end up being affected by affecting not to be so. The discreet should never seem to be aware of their merits; such negligence will attract others' attention. Someone who embodies every quality but, in their own estimation, none, is twice as eminent and by this opposite route ends up being praised.

124:

Be desired. Few win universal favour; if they win the favour of the wise, it's fortunate. Those on the way out are normally held in lukewarm esteem. There are ways to merit the prize of affection: eminence in your occupation and in your skills is a sure way, and an affable manner is effective. Make the eminent job depend on you so that people see that the job needed you, not you the job. Some confer honour on their position; others have honour conferred on them by it. It's no advantage to be thought good because your successor was bad, since this is not unqualified desire for you, but hatred for the other.

125:

Don't keep a tally of ignominious actions.[47] A sign of your own reputation being ruined is caring about the infamy of others. Some would like to conceal, if not wash away, their own flaws with other

people's, or to console themselves with them, which is the consolation of fools. There's a stench about their breath as they're the sewers for other people's filth. The more someone pokes around in such matters, the grubbier they get. Few escape without some innate defect, whether an ancestor's or a relation's. The faults of those who are barely known are not known. The circumspect should shun being record-keepers of infamy, for this is to be a living blacklist, reviled and soulless.

126:

The fool is not someone who does something foolish, but someone who, once this is done, doesn't know how to hide it. Your emotions need to be concealed, and even more so your faults. Everyone errs, but with this difference: the shrewd dissimulate what they've done, while fools blab about what they're about to do. Reputation is more a matter of caution than of deeds; if you're not pure, be cautious. A great person's mistakes are observed more closely, like the eclipses of the largest planets. The only things that shouldn't be disclosed in a friendship are your faults; were it possible, these shouldn't even be disclosed to yourself. But another rule of life can be helpful here: know how to forget.

127:

Nonchalant grace in everything. It gives life to your talents, spirit to your speech, soul to your deeds, lustre to splendour itself. Other

accomplishments embellish nature, but graceful nonchalance embellishes these accomplishments themselves. It's lauded even in our reasoning. It mostly comes naturally, and owes little to study, for it's superior to all rules. It surpasses ease and outstrips elegance; it suggests naturalness and adds perfection. Without it, all beauty is lifeless, and all grace, a disgrace. It transcends courage, discretion, prudence and majesty itself. It's an expedient shortcut in all transactions, and an elegant way out of any tight spot.

128:

A sublime spirit. This is one of the key requisites of a hero, since it inspires all manner of greatness: it heightens your taste, enlarges your heart, elevates your thoughts, ennobles your condition and lays the ground for grandeur. Wherever it's found, it stands out, and though sometimes denied by those envious of good fortune, it's ever eager to excel. It expands the will, although its possibilities may be restricted. Magnanimity, generosity, and every heroic quality recognize it as their source.

129:

Never complain. Complaining always brings discredit. It incites the passionate to disrespect you more than the compassionate to console you. It paves the way for anyone who hears it to follow suit and, learning of the first person's insult, makes the second feel theirs is excusable. By complaining of past offences, some people

create the basis for future ones, and seeking help or comfort, they encounter only satisfaction and even disdain. A better policy is to celebrate the benefits received from some so others will imitate them. To enumerate favours received from those who are absent is to solicit them from those present; it's to sell the credit due to the former to the latter. A circumspect man never makes public either slights or flaws, only the marks of esteem received, for these serve to maintain friends and restrain enemies.

130:

Do, and appear to do.[48] Things don't pass for what they are, but for what they seem. To be of value and to know how to show this is to be doubly valuable. It's as if what isn't seen doesn't exist. Reason itself isn't venerated when it lacks any semblance of reason. The deceived are far more numerous than the alert; deceit is rife and things are only judged by their exterior. There are things that are very different from how they appear. A good exterior is the best recommendation of a perfect interior.

131:

A gallant nature. The soul has its elegance, its nobility of spirit, whose gallant acts make the heart truly magnificent. Not all possess this, since it presupposes magnanimity. Its first concern is to speak well of an enemy, and to act even better. It reveals its true brilliance in situations that call for revenge: it doesn't avoid them,

but takes advantage of them, turning revenge, when most assured, into unexpected generosity. It is part of politics, the most valued part of reason of state. It never makes a show of its triumphs, because it never puts on a show of anything, and when it does triumph through merit, it simply conceals this.

132:

Reconsider things. Taking a second look at things provides security, especially when the solution isn't obvious. Take your time, whether to grant something or to improve your situation – new reasons to confirm and corroborate your personal judgement will appear. If it's a question of giving, then a gift is more valued because wisely given than quickly given; something long desired is always more appreciated. If you must refuse, then it allows time to think how, and for your refusal to taste less bitter, because more mature and considered. More often than not, once the initial desire for something has cooled, a refusal will not be felt as a rebuff. If someone asks for something quickly, delay granting it, which is a trick to deflect attention elsewhere.

133:

Better mad with the crowd than sane all alone, say politicians. For if everyone is mad, you'll be different to none, and if good sense stands alone, it will be taken as madness. To go with the flow is so important.[49] The greatest form of knowledge is, on occasion, not to

know, or to affect not to know. You have to live with others, and most are ignorant.[50] To live alone, you must be either very like God or a complete animal.[51] But I would modify the aphorism and say: better sane with the majority than mad all alone. For some want to be unique in their fantastical illusions.

134:

Have double of life's necessities. This is to double life. Don't depend on just one person, or limit yourself to a single resource, however excellent. Everything should be doubled, and especially the sources of advantage, favour and pleasure. The mutability of the moon pervades everything and sets a limit on all permanence, especially in areas that depend on our frail human will. Let your reserves help you against the fragility of life, and let a key rule of the art of living be to double the sources of your own benefit and comfort. Just as nature doubled the most important and exposed parts of the body, so human skill should double those things on which we depend.

135:

Don't be given to contradiction. This is to burden yourself with foolishness and annoyance. Good sense should conspire against it. To raise objections to everything can certainly reveal ingenuity, but a stubborn person cannot escape being a fool. Such people turn conversation into a battleground, and are more of an enemy to their

acquaintances than to those who never deal with them. A bone is most annoying when in a tasty mouthful, and contradiction is the bone of pleasant moments. People given to contradiction are pernicious fools who combine barbarity and brutishness.

136:

Fully understand matters. Immediately take the pulse of affairs. Many either beat about the bush, futilely debating things, or tediously and verbosely branch off, without ever getting to the crux of the matter. They circle endlessly around a point, tiring out others and themselves, but never come to what's truly important. This comes from having a confused mind that doesn't know how to disentangle itself. They waste time and patience on what they should have ignored, and then have no patience for what they did ignore.

137:

The wise person should be self-sufficient.[52] One such was all things to himself, and so having himself, he had all things with him.[53] If one universally accomplished friend is enough to make Rome and the rest of the universe,[54] then be that friend to yourself and you will be able to live completely on your own. Whom will you need, if there's no opinion or taste greater than your own? You'll depend only on yourself, for it's supreme happiness to be like the Supreme Being. Anyone who can live alone has nothing of the brute about them, but much of the wise person, and everything of God.

138:

The art of leaving things alone. Especially when the seas of public or personal life are stormiest. There are whirlwinds in the affairs of men, tempests of the will, and it makes good sense to retire and wait things out in a safe harbour. Remedies often make troubles worse. Let nature or morality take its course. The wise doctor needs to know when to prescribe something and when not, and often the art lies in not applying any remedy at all. Simply sitting back can be a way of calming the whirlwinds of the mob. Yielding to time now will lead to victory later. A spring's water is easily muddied; you will never make it clear by trying to, only by leaving it well alone. There is no better remedy for disorder than to let it run its course; it will then disappear on its own.

139:

Know your unlucky days, for they exist. Nothing will work out right and, even though you change your game, your bad luck will remain. After a few moves you should recognize bad luck, and then withdraw, realizing whether it's your lucky day or not. Even understanding has its moments, for no one is knowledgeable on all occasions. It takes good fortune to reason successfully, just as to write a letter well. All perfection depends on the opportune moment. Even beauty is not always in fashion. Discretion contradicts itself, sometimes falling short, sometimes going too far. To work out well, everything depends on the right time. Just as on

some days everything turns out badly, on others it all goes well – and with less effort. It's as though everything has already been done; your ingenuity and character are perfectly aligned with your lucky star. Take advantage of such occasions and don't waste a single moment of them. But a judicious man given one obstacle shouldn't declare it a bad day, or a good one given the reverse, for the former might just be a setback, and the latter, luck.

140:

Immediately find the good in everything. This is the blessing of those with good taste. A bee heads for something sweet to make honey and a snake for something bitter to make poison; so with our tastes, some making for the best, others for the worst. There is nothing without some good in it, especially a book, the product of reflection. Some people's characters are so wretched that, amidst a thousand good qualities, they find the only possible flaw that might exist and proceed to censure and celebrate it. They scavenge the will and the understanding for dirt, burdening themselves with faults and flaws. This is more a punishment for their misguided discernment than a sign of their subtlety. They have miserable lives, always feeding on affliction and gorging on imperfections. More fortunate are those who, amidst a thousand flaws, immediately find the one good point which happens to be there.

141:

Don't enjoy the sound of your own voice. If you don't please others, it's little use pleasing yourself, and self-satisfaction is normally punished with universal contempt. To give yourself credit means you are in debt to everyone else. To want both to talk and to listen to yourself doesn't go down well, and if talking to yourself when alone is a sign of madness, then listening to yourself in front of others is doubly so. A weakness of the great is to scatter their conversation with phrases which importune their listeners, like 'am I right?' and 'don't you think?', approval or flattery nodding assent at every point, exhausting all good sense. The pompous also speak with an echo and, as their haughty conversation teeters along, after every word they solicit the annoying support of that stupid phrase 'well said!'

142:

Don't support the worse side out of stubbornness, simply because your opponent has already chosen the better one. The battle will be lost before it's begun and you'll inevitably have to surrender, scorned. You'll never come out best by supporting the worst. Your opponent showed astuteness in anticipating the better side, and you'd be stupid in then deciding to support the worse. Those obstinate in deeds are more stubborn than those obstinate in words, for actions carry more risk than words. The stupidity of stubborn people is seen in their not recognizing what's true or advantageous, preferring argument and contradiction. The circumspect are always on the side

of reason, not passion, having got in first to support the best or, if not, having subsequently improved their position, for if their opponents are fools, their very stupidity will make them change course, switch sides, and thereby worsen their position. The only way to get your opponent to stop supporting what's best is to support it yourself, for their stupidity will then make them drop it, and their stubbornness will be their downfall.

143:

Don't go against existing belief to avoid seeming vulgar. Both extremes bring discredit. Anything not in keeping with gravity is a form of stupidity. Whatever is contrary to opinion is a form of deception, popular at first and admired for its novelty and piquancy. But following the disillusion that comes when it founders, it is utterly disdained. It is a type of fraud, and in politics is the ruin of states.[55] Those who cannot or dare not achieve true distinction by the path of virtue take instead this path of contrariness, provoking the admiration of fools and proving many sensible people right. It suggests someone's personal judgement is unbalanced, and is therefore greatly at odds with prudence. And although not always founded on falsehood, it is on uncertainty, posing a great threat to dignity.

144:

Go in supporting the other person's interests so as to come out achieving your own.[56] This is a strategy for achieving what you want. Even in matters concerning heaven, Christian teachers recommend such holy astuteness. It's an important kind of dissimulation, because the perceived benefit is just the bait to catch another's will. They'll think you are furthering their own aims, but this will be no more than a means of furthering your own. You should never enter into anything recklessly, especially when there's an undercurrent of danger. With people whose first word is usually 'no', it's also best to conceal your true intentions so that they won't focus on the difficulties of saying 'yes', especially when you sense their aversion to doing so. This piece of advice belongs with those about concealed intentions, for all involve extreme subtlety.

145:

Don't expose your sore finger, or everything will knock against it. Don't complain about your sore points, for malice always attacks where our weaknesses hurt most. Getting annoyed will only serve to spur on someone else's enjoyment. The ill-intentioned are searching for a pretext to get your back up. Their dart-like insinuations aim to discover where you hurt, and they'll try a thousand different ways until they hit upon your most sensitive point. The circumspect pretend not to notice and never reveal their troubles, whether their own or their family's, for even fortune occasionally likes to hit where it hurts most, and it always cuts to

the quick. You should therefore never reveal what causes you pain or pleasure, so that the former may quickly end and the latter long continue.

146:

Look beneath the surface. Things are usually very different from how they initially appeared, and ignorance, which didn't look beneath the surface, turns to disillusion when it penetrates to the interior. Falsehood always arrives first; it drags along fools with their endless vulgarity. Truth always arrives last, and late, limping along with Time. Mother Nature wisely gave us two ears, and the sensible always have one listening out for truth. Deceit is very superficial, and the superficial soon encounter it. Insight retires into itself so as to be more esteemed by the wise and the discreet.

147:

Don't be inaccessible. Nobody is so perfect that they don't sometimes need advice. Someone who refuses to listen is an incurable fool. The most independent person must still accept the need for friendly advice; even a monarch must be willing to be taught. There are individuals beyond all help because they are inaccessible and who come unstuck because nobody dares to stop them. The most self-sufficient person must leave a door open to friendship, from where all help will come. You need a friend of sufficient influence over you to be able to advise and admonish you freely. Your trust and

high opinion of their loyalty and prudence should place them in this position of authority. Though such authority and respect shouldn't be handed to all and sundry, have in caution's innermost room a confidant, a faithful mirror, whose correction you value when disillusionment is necessary.

148:

Possess the art of conversation, which reveals you to be a true person. As the commonest human activity, it requires the greatest care. Here you can win or lose, for if caution is needed to write a letter, a form of conversation which is thought out and written down, how much more actual conversation where discretion is always being tested. The experienced take the mind's pulse through the tongue's words; as the wise man said, 'Speak, if you want me to know you'.[57] Some believe art in conversation to be the lack of art, thinking it should be as comfortable as baggy clothing. This is only when among good friends. When respect is demanded, conversation must be more substantial, reflecting the greater substance of the person. To get it right, you must be attuned to the temperament and intellect of all taking part, and neither censor another's words, or you'll be thought a pedant, nor judge their statements, or people will shun you and refuse to engage with you. In speaking, discretion is more important than eloquence.

149:

Know how to deflect trouble on to someone else. Having a shield against ill will is a great trick of rulers. To have someone else who can be criticized for mistakes and chastised by gossipmongers is a sign of superior skill, not lack of competence as malice thinks. Not everything can turn out well, nor can everyone be pleased. Have a fall guy, therefore, someone who, at the expense of their own ambition, can be a target for your misfortunes.

150:

Know how to sell your wares. Their intrinsic value is not enough, for not everyone bites to the core or looks beneath the surface. Most people flock to where there is a crowd; they go because they see others going. A large part of artifice is knowing how to commend something, sometimes by singing its praises, for praise entices desire, and sometimes by giving it some fine name, for this is a good way of extolling something – though always avoid affectation. To mark something out as only for connoisseurs acts as an incentive, because everyone thinks they are one, and if they don't, then it will spur their desire to be one. Things should never be commended as easy or common; this is to make them vulgar rather than accessible. Everyone goes after what's unique, because this is more attractive, both to our taste and to our intellect.

151:

Think ahead: today for tomorrow, and even for many days after that. The greatest foresight is to have abundant time for it. For the far-sighted, nothing is unexpected; there are no tight spots for those who are prepared. Don't save your reason for when difficulties arise, use it well before that. Anticipate critical times with mature reflection. The pillow is a silent Sibyl and sleeping on things is better than lying awake under their weight. Some act first and think later, which is to search for excuses rather than consequences. Others think neither before nor after. The whole of life should be a process of deliberation to choose the right course. Reflection and foresight provide the means of living in anticipation.

152:

Never be associated with someone who can cast you in a poor light, whether because they're better or worse than you. The more perfect they are, the higher their esteem. They will always play the lead role, and you a secondary one, and if you win any esteem, it will simply be their leftovers. The moon on its own stands out among the stars, but when the sun comes out, it either doesn't appear or it disappears. Never consort with someone who eclipses you, only with someone who enhances you. In this way Martial's discreet Fabulla[58] was able to appear beautiful and to shine amidst the ugliness and slovenliness of her maids. Similarly, don't take the risk of keeping bad company, and don't honour others at the cost of

your own reputation. To improve yourself, associate with the eminent; once perfected, with the mediocre.

153:

Avoid stepping into great men's shoes. And if you do, be sure of your own superiority. To equal your predecessor you will need to be worth twice as much. Just as it's a good strategy to make sure your successor is such that people will miss you, so also to make sure your predecessor doesn't eclipse you. It's difficult to fill the void left by someone great because the past always seems better; even being their equal isn't enough, because they'll always have the advantage of having come first. To topple someone's greater reputation, then, you need qualities above and beyond theirs.

154:

Don't be too quick to believe or to bestow affection. Maturity is revealed by a slowness to believe; lies are commonplace, so let belief be rare. Whoever is easily swayed is soon embarrassed by it. But don't voice your doubts about a person's truthfulness, this just adds insult to injury, because it treats them as either a deceiver or as someone deceived. And this isn't the worst of it, since an unwillingness to believe others is a sign of being a liar, for a liar has a double misfortune, neither believing nor being believed. Sensible listeners suspend their judgement and should trust the author who says eagerness to bestow affection is a form of imprudence.[59] For

you can lie not only with words, but with actions, and this second form of deceit is more pernicious because of its consequences.

155:

Skill in controlling your passions. If possible, prudent reflection should anticipate their sudden, vulgar onrush. This will not be difficult for someone prudent. The first step when your passions are aroused is to notice that they are; this enables you to exercise control over them from the start and to estimate just how much anger is necessary. With such supreme care, let your outbursts be quickly over. Know how to stop at the right time and in the right way, for the most difficult thing about running is stopping. A sure sign of a sound mind is to keep cool at moments of extreme emotion. Any excess of strong emotion weakens reason, but with such masterful attention, it will never trample over reason or go beyond the bounds of moral sense.[60] To correct a passionate emotion you need always to keep a grip on caution's reins. Then you will be the first, and possibly the last, to disprove the saying that no one is wise once they are in the saddle.[61]

156:

Choose your friends: they should become so after being examined by discretion, tested by fortune, and certified not simply by your will but your understanding. Although the most important thing in life, it's usually the one over which least care is taken: some are forced

upon us, most are the result of pure chance. A person is defined by the friends they have, and the wise never make friends with fools. But liking someone's company need not suggest true intimacy – it can simply mean enjoying their humour rather than having any confidence in their actual abilities. Some friendships are like a marriage, others like an affair; the latter are for pleasure, the former for the abundant success they engender. Few are friends because of you yourself, many because of your good fortune. A friend's true understanding is worth more than the many good wishes of others. Make friends by choice, then, not by chance. A wise friend can prevent troubles, a foolish one can cause them. And don't wish friends too much good fortune, if you don't want to lose them.

157:

Don't be mistaken about people, the worst and easiest mistake to make. It's better to be cheated by the price than the product. A person is the thing that most needs to be scrutinized beneath the surface. There is a difference between understanding things and knowing people, and grasping people's characters and distinguishing their true temperaments is a profound form of knowledge. It is as necessary to study people as it is books.

158:

Know how to use your friends. This requires its own art of discretion. Some are useful at a distance, others close to hand, and someone who is perhaps no good for conversation will be as a correspondent. Distance removes defects that are intolerable close up. You shouldn't simply seek enjoyment from friendship, but profit, for it should have the three qualities of goodness,[62] though others argue it should have those of being – which is one, good and true – since a friend is all things. Few are capable of being good friends, and not knowing how to choose them makes their actual number even fewer. Knowing how to keep friends is harder than acquiring them. Look for friends who will last, and although they will be new at first, take satisfaction in knowing they will be old friends in time. The best are undoubtedly those most seasoned – although you may need to share a bushel of salt [63] with them to reach this point. There's no desert like a life without friends: friendship multiplies blessings and divides troubles. It's the only remedy for bad fortune and is an oasis of comfort for the soul.

159:

Know how to suffer fools. The wise have always been the least patient, for as knowledge increases, so does impatience. It's difficult to satisfy someone who knows a great deal. The greatest rule in life, according to Epictetus,[64] is to endure things, and he reduced half of wisdom to this. If every type of stupidity is to be tolerated, a great deal of patience will be needed. Sometimes we tolerate most from

those on whom we most depend, which fact enables us to triumph over ourselves. From tolerance arises peace, the inestimable joy of the world. Those who find themselves unable to tolerate others should retreat into themselves – if they can actually tolerate themselves.

160:

Talk circumspectly. With rivals, through caution; with everyone else, through decorum. There's always time to utter a word, but not to take it back. You should speak as wills are written, for the fewer the words, the fewer the disputes. Use occasions that don't matter to practise for those that do. Mystery has a hint of the divine about it. The loquacious are more easily conquered and convinced.

161:

Know your pet failings. The most perfect person is not without some – and is usually happily married to, or living with, them. Even ingenuity has its flaws, and the greater the ingenuity, the greater or more noticeable the flaws, not because the individual is unaware of them, but because they treasure them. A double fault: irrational passion, and for your own vices. They are blemishes on perfection, as offensive to others as they are attractive to the individual concerned. This is an opportunity to exercise noble self-control and enhance your other qualities. Everyone notices a minor failing, and instead of celebrating the many good points to be admired, they

linger on the flaw they have noticed, using it to besmirch the rest of your qualities.

162:

Know how to triumph over envy and malevolence. Showing contempt, even if prudent, achieves little; being polite is much better. Nothing is more worthy of applause than speaking well of someone who speaks ill of you, and no revenge more heroic than merit and talent conquering and tormenting envy. Each blessing is a further torture to ill will, and the glory of those envied is a personal hell to the envious. The greatest punishment is making your good fortune their poison. An envious person doesn't die straight off, but bit by bit every time the person envied receives applause, the enduring fame of one rivalling the punishment of the other, the former in everlasting glory, the latter everlasting torment. Fame's trumpet heralds one person's immortality and announces another's death – a sentence to hang by envy's anxious rope.

163:

Never let compassion for the unfortunate earn you the disfavour of the fortunate. One person's misfortune is normally another's good fortune, for there can never be a lucky person without many unlucky ones. The unfortunate tend to attract the goodwill of people who want to compensate them for fortune's lack of favour with their own worthless favour. And it has sometimes been known

for a person who was hated by everyone whilst they prospered to gain everyone's compassion in adversity; desire for revenge against the exalted turns to compassion for the fallen. But a shrewd person must pay close attention to fortune's shuffling of the cards. Some always side with the unfortunate, sidling up to them in their misfortune having previously shunned them when they enjoyed good fortune. This perhaps suggests innate nobility, but not an ounce of shrewdness.

164:

Test the waters, to see whether things will be accepted, how they will be received, especially those whose outcome and welcome are in doubt. This ensures a good result and gives the chance either to press on or to withdraw. The will of others can be tested in this way, and the circumspect will know if they are on solid ground: a vital precaution when asking, seeking, or governing.

165:

Fight a clean fight. A sensible person can be forced to fight, but not to fight dirty; each person must act according to who they are, not who others force them to be. Being gallant towards rivals is commendable; you should fight not just to win, but to win gallantly. To win in a contemptible way is not a victory but a defeat. Generosity has always been superior. A good person never uses forbidden weapons, such as those furnished by a friendship turned

to hatred, for confidences should never be exploited for revenge. Anything that smacks of treachery taints your good name. The slightest trace of anything base in an honourable person stands out more: there must always be a great distance between nobility and villainy. Pride yourself on the fact that if gallantry, generosity and fidelity disappeared from the world, they could be found in you.

166:

Differentiate between a sayer and a doer. This is a key distinction, along with that between those who are friends with you and those who are friends with your position, two very different things. Having no good words and no bad deeds is bad; worse is having no bad words and no good deeds. Being pure air, words offer no sustenance, and you cannot live on civility, which is polite deception. To dazzle a bird is the best way to catch it. The conceited are always content with air. Words must be the pledges of deeds, and thus must have the same value. Trees which bear no fruit, only leaves, are usually rotten at heart; you should know them all, those that are of real use, and those that provide only shade.

167:

Know how to help yourself. A stout heart is the best company in tight situations, and when it falters, the other parts of the body should step up to help. Troubles are lessened for those who know how to help themselves. Don’t give in to misfortune, for it will end up

being intolerable. Some help themselves very little when confronted with difficulties and double them through not knowing how to bear them. A person who knows himself addresses his weakness with careful thought, and a discreet person emerges victorious over everything, even the stars.

168:

Don't become a monster of stupidity. Everyone who is vain, conceited, stubborn, capricious, obstinate, outlandish, ridiculous, comical, fanciful, paradoxical and partisan, and every kind of unbalanced individual, is such: all are monsters of incongruity. Deformity of the mind is uglier than that of the body because it goes against divine beauty. But who will ever correct such widespread discord? Where moral sense[65] is lacking, there is no place for guidance and advice, and a scornful observation is mistakenly presumed to be applause.

169:

Take more care not to fail once than to succeed a hundred times. Nobody looks at the sun when it's shining, everyone when it's eclipsed. The masses, ever critical, will not recount your successes, only your failures. The bad are better known through gossip than the good are through acclaim. Many people were never heard of until they went astray, and all our successes will never be enough to negate a single, tiny blemish. Let nobody be under any illusion:

malevolence will point out every bad thing you do, but not a single good one.

170:

Always have something in reserve. This will secure your position. Don't employ all your means or draw on all your strength every time. Even where knowledge is concerned, something should be kept back, for this doubles your perfection. There must always be something you can draw on in a tight spot. A relief force, being valorous and honourable, achieves more than an assault. Good sense has always erred on the safe side. Even here we see the truth of that sharp paradox: the half is greater than the whole.

171:

Don't waste favours. Important friends are for important occasions. Don't draw on great intimacy in a minor matter, for this is to squander a favour: the sheet anchor should always be saved for extreme situations. If big guns are used for trifling matters, what will you have left for later? There's nothing more valuable than a protector, nor more precious than favour. It makes or breaks everything in the world, even ingenuity. The favour shown to the wise by nature and fame is envied by fortune. It is more important to know how to keep hold of people than possessions.

172:

Don't engage with someone with nothing to lose. It's an unequal fight. Such opponents will fight with no constraints, having lost even shame; they are through with everything, have nothing more to lose, and so will throw themselves into all manner of impropriety. Reputation, which is priceless, should never be exposed to such a cruel risk; it takes years to earn, and will be lost in a minute over something minor. Much honourable toil and sweat is wiped out with a single offence. Having much to lose makes people of honour think twice. Looking after their honour, they look out for anything contrary to it, and since they are cautious to commit themselves, they proceed with such slowness that prudence has sufficient time to withdraw and safeguard their honour. Not even a victory will regain what has already been lost by exposing themselves to loss.

173:

Don't be brittle as glass in dealing with people. And especially with friends. Some people crack easily, revealing their fragility. They fill up with offence and fill others with annoyance. They reveal a nature so petty and sensitive that it tolerates nothing, in jest or in earnest. The slightest thing offends them, so insults are never necessary. Those who have dealings with them have to tread carefully, always attending to their sensibilities and adjusting to their temperaments, since the slightest snub annoys them. They are completely self-centred, slaves to their own pleasure, in pursuit of which they'll trample over everything, and idolaters of punctiliousness. Be

instead like a lover, whose condition is akin to the diamond in its endurance and resistance.

174:

Don't live in a hurry. To know how to parcel things out is to know how to enjoy them. With many people their happiness is all over with life still to spare. They waste happy moments, which they don't enjoy, and then want to go back later when they find themselves so far down the road. They are life's postilions, adding their own headlong rush to time's inexorable march. They want to devour in a day what could barely be digested in a lifetime. They anticipate every happiness, bolt down the years still to come, and since they're always in such a rush, quickly finish everything. Moderation is necessary even in our desire for knowledge so as not to know things badly. There are more days than joys to fill them. Take enjoyment slowly and tasks quickly. It's good when tasks are completed, but bad when happiness is over.

175:

A person of substance. And whoever is, is never content with those who aren't. Unhappy the person whose eminence is not based on real substance. Not all who seem to be people, are: some are impostors whose intercourse with wild fancy gives birth to duplicity; and others, similar to them, give them their support and prefer the uncertainty of a lie, which offers so much, to the

certainty of a truth, which secures so little. But in the end, their fancies turn out badly because they lack a firm foundation. Only truth can provide a solid reputation, and substance real benefit. One fraud requires many others and so its whole edifice becomes a sham; being built on air, it must come crashing down. Something baseless cannot last long: seeing how much such things promise is enough to make them seem suspicious, just as something which proves too much, proves nothing.

176:

Either know, or listen to someone who does. You can't live without understanding, whether your own or someone else's. There are many, however, who don't know that they don't know, and others who think they know, but don't.[66] Stupidity's faults are incurable, for since the ignorant don't know what they are, they don't search for what they lack. Some individuals would be wise if they didn't believe that they already were. Given all this, although oracles of good sense are rare, they sit idle, because nobody consults them. Seeking advice will neither diminish your greatness nor refute your ability. In fact, it will enhance your reputation. Engage with reason so misfortune doesn't contend with you.

177:

Avoid familiarity when dealing with people. It should be neither used nor permitted. Anyone who does will lose the superiority which

stems from dignity, and so lose esteem. The stars, precisely because they remain so distant, maintain their splendour. Divinity demands respect; familiarity breeds contempt. With human affairs, the greater the familiarity, the lower the esteem, because communication reveals the imperfections which reserve concealed. Familiarity is not advisable with anyone: with your superiors, because it's dangerous; with your inferiors, because unseemly; and especially not with the rabble who, being stupid and so insolent, will not recognize the favour shown them and will take it as their due. Familiarity is a form of vulgarity.

178:

Believe your heart, especially when it's already tried and tested. Never contradict it, for it can usually foresee what matters most. It is your private oracle. Many have perished from what they feared, but what use is such fear if you can't find a remedy? Some people have an utterly loyal heart, the advantage of natural superiority, and it always forewarns them, raising the alarm so they can seek a solution. It doesn't make good sense to rush out to meet problems, but it does to go out ready to conquer them.

179:

Reticence is the stamp of true ability. A heart with no secrets is an open letter. Where there's true depth, there are profound secrets, for there are great spaces and hidden coves where important things

can be submerged. Reticence comes from true mastery of yourself, and conquering yourself in this area is a real triumph. Tribute is paid by us to all those to whom we open up. Prudence's health rests on inner moderation. The reticent risk being probed, contradicted to break their silence, and having insinuations made to provoke the most tight-lipped and circumspect. Things which have to be done shouldn't be spoken about, and those which have to be spoken about shouldn't be done.

180:

Never be ruled by what you think your enemy should do. Fools never do what a sensible person thinks they will, because they can't discern what's best. Neither will those with discretion, because they will want to hide their intentions which may have been discerned and even anticipated. The *pro* and the *contra* of every matter should be thought through and both sides analysed,[67] anticipating the different courses things may take. Opinions vary: let impartiality be attentive not so much to what will happen as to what may.

181:

Without lying, don't reveal every truth. Nothing requires more care than the truth, which is an opening up of the heart. It's as necessary to know how to reveal it as to conceal it. With a single lie, a reputation for integrity is lost: deceit is viewed as a fault, and a

deceiver as false, which is worse. Not all truths can be spoken: some because they are important to me, others to someone else.

182:

A dash of boldness in everything is an important element of good sense. You should moderate your opinion of others so as not to think so highly of them that you fear them; never let your imagination conquer your heart. Some people appear great until you have dealings with them, such communication provoking disillusion rather than esteem. No one can exceed humanity's narrow confines; all have their shortcomings, some in intellect, others in temperament. Rank bestows apparent authority, but rarely does personal authority accompany this, for luck normally takes revenge on a superior position by placing there someone of inferior merit. Imagination always runs away with itself and paints things as more than they are. It imagines not only what is, but what might be. Let reason, which experience has left with few illusions, correct it. But stupidity should not be bold, nor virtue fearful. If confidence helps the simple, how much more the worthy and the wise!

183:

Don't hold opinions doggedly. Every fool is utterly convinced, and everyone utterly convinced is a fool, and the more mistaken their opinion, the greater their tenacity. Even when the evidence is clear, it's sensible to yield, for the correctness of your position will not go

unnoticed, and your politeness will be recognized. More is lost with stubborn insistence than can be gained by winning; this is not to defend truth, but vulgarity. There are those who are completely stubborn, difficult to convince, incurably vehement; when caprice and conviction are found together, they are always indissolubly wed to folly. Your will must be tenacious, not your judgement. There are, however, exceptions when you mustn't lose and be doubly defeated, once in the argument, and again in its consequences.

184:

Don't stand on ceremony. Even in a king,[68] such affectation was declared to be highly singular. Anyone punctilious is annoying, and there are whole nations given to such fastidiousness. Fools' clothes are sewn with the petit point of honour; idolaters of their own honour, their fear that everything may offend it shows it rests on very little. It's right to care about respect, but not to be taken as a master of affectation and show. It's certainly true that someone lacking in ceremony requires real ability. Courtesy should be neither affected nor scorned. Whoever fixates on petty formalities shows a lack of greatness.

185:

Don't stake your reputation on a single throw. If it doesn't go your way, the damage is irreparable. You are very likely to fail once, and especially the first time. No one can always be in luck, hence the

saying ‘it’s your lucky day’. If you fail the first time, make up for it with the second; and if you succeed straight off, this will be the precursor of further success – there should always be the means of doing more and better. Things depend on chance events, and many of them, so it’s a rare piece of good fortune when things go well.

186:

Recognize faults, whatever the approval they enjoy. Integrity shouldn’t fail to recognize vice, even when this is dressed in brocade: it may sometimes be crowned with gold, but this cannot hide its failings. Although an individual’s nobility may disguise it, vice’s base servility can never be shaken off. Vices might be ennobled, but they are never noble. Some people see that this hero had that failing, but not that this wasn’t what made him a hero. The example of a great person is so eloquent that it even wins us over to their ugly flaws, flattery sometimes even aping facial flaws,[69] not realizing that whilst these are overlooked in the great, they are detested in the lowly.

187:

Anything popular, do yourself; anything unpopular, use others to do it.[70] With the one you garner affection, with the other you deflect hatred. The great are fortunate in their generosity, since for them, doing good is more pleasurable than receiving it.[71] Rarely do you upset someone without upsetting yourself, either through

compassion or remorse. Those at the top necessarily have to reward or punish. Let good things come directly, bad ones indirectly. Have something to deflect hatred and slander, the blows of the disgruntled. Common anger is normally like an angry dog which, not knowing the reason for its pain, attacks the instrument that inflicts it simply because this, though not the ultimate cause, is close at hand.

188:

Be ready to praise. This does credit to your good taste, suggesting that this is refined and that those present can expect the same appreciation. Whoever has encountered perfection once, will know how to appreciate it again. By raising something praiseworthy, you provide material for conversation and imitation. It is also a politic way of advertising your courtesy to the perfect individuals around you. Some people, in contrast, always manage to condemn, praising whoever's present by pouring scorn on whoever's not. This goes down well with superficial people who don't spot the trick involved in speaking ill of some to others. Others make it a policy to praise today's mediocrities more than yesterday's marvels. A circumspect person should recognize these subtle ways of cosying up to someone, and be neither dismayed by the exaggerated criticism nor flattered by the praise, realizing that such people behave in the same way with everyone, always adjusting their views of people according to the company.

189:

Take advantage of what a person lacks, for if this leads to desire, it's the most effective form of coercion. Philosophers have said privation is nothing, politicians that it is everything, and the latter understood things better. Some people use the desires of others as steps to reach their own ends. They seize every opportunity and use the difficulty of satisfying a particular appetite as the means to arouse it. They expect more from the heat of desire than from the tepidity of possession, and the more obstacles there are, the more intense desire becomes. To keep people dependent on you is a very subtle way of achieving your own ends.

190:

Find the consolation in everything. Even the completely useless can find it in being eternal. There is no hardship without some comfort: fools are lucky, and the saying refers to 'the luck of the ugly'. To live long the best bet is to be worth little: the cracked bowl is always annoyingly the one that never actually breaks. Fortune seems to envy the most important individuals, for it matches longevity with uselessness and importance with brevity. Those who matter pass away quickly, whilst the worthless go on forever, literally, or so it seems. As for the unfortunate, luck and death seem to conspire to forget them.

191:

Don't be pleased with excessive courtesy, for it is a form of deception. Some people don't need the herbs of Thessaly[72] to cast a spell, merely doffing their hats is enough to enchant fools – or the conceited, as I call them. They set a price on honour and pay with fine but empty words. Whoever promises everything, promises nothing, and promises are a trap for fools. True courtesy is an obligation, affected courtesy, especially excessive courtesy, a deception, an expression not of politeness but of dependency. Such people bow not to the person, but to their fortune, and offer praise not in acknowledgement of their qualities, but in expectation of future benefits.

192:

A truly peaceable person is a person with a long life. To live, let live. The peaceable not only live, but reign. You should see and hear, but remain silent. A day without an argument leads to a sleep-filled night. To live a lot and to enjoy life is to live twice: this is the fruit of peace. A person has everything who cares nothing about what matters little. There's no greater absurdity than taking everything seriously. Similarly, it's stupid to take things to heart that don't concern you, and not to take to heart those that are important.

193:

Beware the person who goes in supporting someone else's interests so as to come out achieving their own.[73] There is no defence against

astuteness like attentiveness. It takes someone skilled to catch someone skilful. Some make their affairs yours, and if you don't decipher their intentions, you'll find yourself forever burning your fingers pulling things from the fire for them.[74]

194:

Have a realistic idea of yourself and your affairs, especially when you are setting out in life. Everyone has too high an opinion of themselves, especially those with least reason to. Each person dreams about their own good fortune and imagines themself a prodigy. Hope foolishly rushes in, and then experience doesn't deliver; the disillusionment provoked by actual reality is torment to its vain imagination. Good sense should correct such mistakes and, although it may hope for the best, it should always expect the worst, so that it can accept whatever happens with equanimity. It's a skill to aim slightly too high so as to make the shot, but not so high that you miss the target. When you begin a task, an adjustment of expectations is always necessary, for any presumption not backed up by experience is usually mistaken. There is no more universal cure for such stupidity than common sense. Everyone should know their own sphere of activity and their station; they will then be able to adjust their ideas to reality.

195:

Know how to appreciate. There's no one who can't be better than someone at something, and none who excel who can't be excelled. Knowing how to enjoy the best in everyone is a useful form of knowledge. The wise appreciate everyone, recognizing the good in all and knowing how much it costs to do things well. Fools despise everyone because they are ignorant of the good and choose the worst.

196:

Know your lucky star. There's nobody so hopeless that they don't have one, and if you are unfortunate, it's because you don't know which it is. Some are close to princes and the powerful without knowing how or why, except that their luck brought them this favour; all that remains is for their own hard work to help it along. Others find themselves smiled on by the wise. One person is more acceptable in one country than another, and better regarded in this city than that. People will have better luck in one job or position than in others for which they have equal or even identical qualities. Luck shuffles the cards as and when it wants. Let everyone know their lucky star as well as their abilities, for this is a matter of winning or losing. Know how to follow it and help it; never swap it or you will wander off course.

197:

Never be hindered by fools. Someone who doesn't recognize fools is a fool, and an even bigger one is someone who does and doesn't shun them. They are dangerous in superficial encounters and truly harmful in confidential matters. And although their own misgivings and the caution of others may contain them for a while, in the end they will do or say something stupid – and if they delay doing so, it's only to make it more serious. Someone who has no reputation can hardly further someone else's. They are always unfortunate, this being the burden of stupidity, and the two always go together. There is only one positive thing about fools: although the sensible are of no benefit to them, they are of great benefit to the wise – as examples and warnings.

198:

Know how to transplant yourself. There are people only valued when they move to other countries, especially in top positions. Countries are stepmothers to their eminent children; envy reigns there as over its own land, and the imperfections with which someone started are remembered more than the greatness they ended up achieving. A pin became valuable travelling from the old world to the new, and a piece of glass led to diamonds being scorned when it was transported. Anything foreign is valued, either because it comes from a distance or because it's only encountered perfect and complete. We have all seen individuals who were utterly scorned in their own backyards and who are now the toast of the world, held

in high esteem by their countrymen because their deeds are followed from a distance, and by foreigners because they come from afar. A statue on an altar will never be venerated by someone who knew it as a tree trunk in a garden.

199:

Know how to garner esteem – wisely, not pushily. The true path to esteem is merit, and when diligence is based on worth this is a shortcut to getting there. Integrity alone is not enough, and diligence alone is unworthy, for things are then so sullied that they discredit your reputation. The true way lies between merit and knowing how to intervene.

200:

Have something still to desire, so as not to be fortunate yet unhappy. The body breathes and the spirit aspires. If you had everything, you would be nothing but disillusioned and unhappy. Even our understanding should always have something further to learn, something on which curiosity can feed. Hope encourages: a surfeit of happiness is fatal. When rewarding people, skilfully leave them unsatisfied. If there's nothing still to desire, there's everything to fear: an unhappy state of good fortune. Fear begins where desire ends.

201:

All those who appear fools are, along with half of those who don't. Stupidity has seized hold of the world, and if there is any wisdom, it's foolishness compared with the wisdom of heaven.[75] But the greatest fool is the person who doesn't believe they are and who declares everyone else is. To be truly wise, it's not enough just to appear to be so, far less to appear so to yourself. The person who knows is the one who thinks they don't, and the person who doesn't see that others see, doesn't see. Although the world is full of fools, nobody thinks, or even suspects, that they are one.

202:

Words and deeds make a perfect man. Express what's very good and do what's very honourable; one shows the perfection of your brain, the other of your heart, and both arise from superiority of spirit. Words are the shadows of deeds, the former female, the latter male. It's more important to be the person celebrated than the one celebrating. Talk is easy, actions difficult. Great deeds are the very substance of life, sayings the embellishment. Eminence in deeds lasts; in words, it fades. Exploits are the fruit of careful reflection: wise words, heroic deeds.

203:

Know the great people of your time. There aren't many: one phoenix in the whole world, one Great Captain, one perfect orator, one wise man in a whole century, one outstanding king[76] across so many. Mediocrities are common, in number and esteem. Outstanding people in any area are rare, since this requires all-round perfection, and the loftier the category, the more difficult pre-eminence. Many have taken the name 'Great' from Caesar and Alexander, but in vain, for without the deeds, the word is just a breath of air. There have been few Senecas, and fame has celebrated only one Apelles.[77]

204:

Undertake what's easy as if it were hard, and what's hard as if it were easy. In the first case, so that confidence doesn't make you careless; in the second, so that lack of confidence doesn't make you discouraged. It takes nothing more for something not to be done than thinking that it is. Conversely, diligence removes impossibilities. Don't think over great undertakings, just seize them when they arise, so that consideration of their difficulty doesn't hold you back.

205:

Know how to use scorn. A trick to get things is to scorn them. When you look for things they aren't normally found but later, when you're not looking, they appear. Since all things of this world are shadows of that above,[78] they share this property of a shadow: they

flee those who pursue them and pursue those who flee them. Scorn is also the most politic form of revenge. The only maxim of the wise is never to defend yourself with your pen, since the written trace it leaves only contributes to a rival's renown rather than punishes their insolence. Unworthy people astutely oppose the great in order to gain a reputation indirectly that they don't merit by right. We wouldn't be aware of many such people if their far superior opponents hadn't paid them any attention. There's no revenge like oblivion, which buries them in the dust of their own insignificance. Rashly they presume to make themselves eternal by setting light to the wonders of the world.[79] The way to silence gossip is to pay it no attention; to fight it causes harm, to give it credit, discredit. It causes rivals satisfaction, for even a shadow of a blot tarnishes the greatest perfection, though it can't totally obscure it.

206:

Realize that the vulgar are everywhere: in Corinth[80] itself, in the best of families. Everyone has experience of this in their own home. But there is vulgarity, and supreme vulgarity, which is worse. This has the same attributes as common vulgarity, like pieces of glass do of a broken mirror, but is even more harmful. It speaks foolishly and criticizes impertinently. It's the great disciple of ignorance, the patron of stupidity, and the ally of gossip. Don't heed what it says, far less what it thinks. It's important to recognize such vulgarity so

you are neither part of it nor its object, for any form of stupidity is vulgar, and the vulgar are always stupid.

207:

Practise self-restraint. You need to be especially alert for the unexpected. The sudden onrush of strong emotion causes good sense to slip, and then there is the risk of ruin. You take things further in a moment of anger or pleasure than in many hours of indifference; passions briefly running free sometimes means running up a lifetime of shame. The astute design such temptations for prudence so as to discover the lie of the land, or someone's mind. By such means they force out secrets and usually get to the bottom of even the most able individual. Restraint, especially of your initial impulses, should be your counter-strategy. Much reflection is needed to stop passion bolting, and someone is truly wise who is wise once they're in the saddle.[81] If you sense danger, proceed carefully. What seems a throwaway comment to the person making it can seem deeply significant to the person who catches and ponders it.

208:

Don't suffer from a fool's sickness. The wise usually suffer from lack of good sense; fools, in contrast, from excess of advice. To suffer like a fool is to suffer from reasoning too much. Some die because they feel things too much and others live because they don't. And so some are fools because they don't die of sorrow and others because

they do. A person who suffers from being too intelligent is a fool. Some suffer, then, through too much understanding and others thrive through none. But for all that many suffer like fools, few fools suffer.

209:

Free yourself from common stupidity. A special kind of good sense. Such stupidity is validated by being widespread and some, who never succumb to one person's ignorance, can't escape collective ignorance. It's common for nobody to be happy with their lot, however good, or to be unhappy with their intellect, however bad. Everyone covets someone else's good fortune, being unhappy with their own. Those alive now praise the things of the past, and those living here praise things over there. Everything in the past seems better, and everything distant is more highly valued. Someone who laughs at everything is as stupid as someone who is annoyed at everything.

210:

Know how to use the truth. It's dangerous, but a good person can't stop speaking it, so artifice is necessary. Skilled physicians of the mind have invented a way of sugaring the truth, for when it brings disillusionment, it is truly bitter. Make skilful use of a pleasant manner here: the same truth can flatter or lambast. Use the dead to speak to the living. Hints will suffice for the wise; when they don't,

it's best to be silent. Princes must not be cured with bitter medicine; that's what the art of gilding disillusion is for.

211:

In heaven, everything is good; in hell, everything bad. In the world, since it lies between the two, you find both. We are placed between two extremes, and so participate in both. Good and bad luck alternate; not all is happy, nor all hostile. This world is a zero: on its own, it's worth nothing; joined to heaven, a great deal. Indifference to its variety constitutes good sense – the wise are never surprised. Our life is arranged like a play, everything will be sorted out in the end. Take care, then, to end it well.[82]

212:

Always keep to yourself the ultimate tricks of your trade. This is what great masters do, making use of such subtlety in the very act of teaching it: always remain superior, and always the master. You need art in communicating your art; never exhaust the source of either your teaching or your giving. In this way, reputation and dependency are maintained. In both granting something and teaching something you need to adhere to that important lesson, constantly fuel admiration and move towards perfection. Keeping something back is, in all areas, a great rule of life and of success, especially in the loftiest enterprises.

213:

Know how to contradict. This is provocation's great strategy, getting others to open up without opening up yourself. It's a unique form of coercion which makes hidden feelings fly out. Lukewarm belief is an emetic for secrets, a key to the most securely locked heart. It subtly probes both will and judgement. Scorn shrewdly expressed towards someone's veiled language is the way to hunt the deepest secrets, drawing these out until they trip off the tongue and are caught in the nets of artful deceit. When someone circumspect shows reserve, this makes someone cautious throw theirs away, revealing what they think in their otherwise inscrutable hearts. A feigned doubt is curiosity's subtlest picklock, enabling it to learn whatever it wants. Even where learning is concerned, contradiction is the pupil's strategy to make the teacher put all their effort into explaining and justifying the truth: a mild challenge leads to consummate instruction.

214:

Don't turn one stupid mistake into two. It's very common in fixing one to commit a further four. To try to amend one inappropriate act with a greater one is akin to telling a lie, or a lie is akin to such stupidity, for one leads to many others. The worst of a bad cause is actually defending it; and worse than something bad is not knowing how to disguise it. Each imperfection taxes us, and the cost

increases as they do. The wisest person can slip up once, but not twice, and only inadvertently, not out of habit.

215:

Beware the person with hidden intentions. It's the trick of a smooth operator to distract someone's will in order to attack it, for in being convinced, it's conquered. Such people conceal their true intention in order to achieve it, placing it in second place so it will come out first: what guarantees their shot is nobody seeing it coming. Don't let your attention nod off whilst their intentions are wide awake; if the latter pretend to place themselves second, the former must be the first to recognize this. Let caution take heed of intention's artifice, noting each turn it makes to arrive at its objective: it proposes one thing, and tries to do another, subtly wheeling round to strike its intended target. Know exactly what you are conceding – and sometimes it's best to let it be understood that you've understood.

216:

Speak clearly. This means not only fluently but with ease of conception. Some conceive things perfectly but have difficulty giving birth to them, for without clarity, concepts and resolutions, the children of the soul, never see the light of day. Some are like those vessels that contain a lot but pour out little; others, in contrast, say even more than they think. Resolution is to the will

what explanation is to the understanding: both sublime. Lucid minds are commendable and whilst muddled ones have often been revered because they are not understood – and sometimes obscurity is best so as not to be vulgar – how can others form an opinion of what they hear, if those talking lack a clear conception of what they say?

217:

Neither love nor hate forever. Trust in today's friends as if tomorrow's worst enemies. Since this actually happens, anticipate it happening. You should never give arms to friendship's turncoats, since they'll wage a devastating war with them. With enemies, in contrast, always leave the door open for reconciliation, gallantry's door being the most effective. Sometimes an earlier act of revenge has subsequently caused torment, and pleasure in the harm done to our enemy, sorrow.

218:

Don't act obstinately, but with care. Stubbornness is as irritating as an abscess; the true daughter of passion, it has never done anything right. There are some who reduce everything to a skirmish; bandits of social intercourse, they want to triumph in everything they do. They don't know how to go about things peacefully. Such people, in positions of authority and rule, are harmful, splitting the government into factions and making enemies of those they should have treated as their children. They want to do everything by

scheming and to succeed by artifice alone, but on discovering their oppositional nature, people turn against them and seek to thwart their fantastical projects, and so they achieve nothing. They suffer from an excess of annoyance, and everything contributes to their aggravation. Their judgement is askew and their hearts sometimes faulty. The way to deal with them is to flee to the opposite side of the world, for the barbarity there is easier to deal with than their savagery.

219:

Don't be known for artifice, although you can't live without it now. Be prudent rather than astute. Everyone likes plain dealing, but not everyone practises it themselves. Don't let sincerity end up as extreme simplicity, nor shrewdness as astuteness. Be revered as wise rather than feared as calculating. Sincere people are loved, but deceived. The greatest artifice may be to conceal such artifice, for it's always viewed as deceit. Openness flourished in the age of gold; malice does in this age of iron.[83] The reputation of someone who knows what they should do is an honourable one and inspires trust; that of someone full of artifice is false and provokes suspicion.

220:

When you can't wear a lion's skin, wear a fox's.[84] To know how to yield to the times is to excel in them. Whoever gets what they want never loses reputation. If force is lacking, use skill; by one way or

another, whether valour's high road or artifice's short cut. More things have been achieved by slyness than by force, and the wise have more often defeated the brave than vice versa. When something lies beyond your reach, disdain makes its appearance.[85]

221:

Don't be annoyingly impetuous – committing yourself or others. Some people are stumbling blocks to their own dignity and to someone else's, and are always on the point of doing something stupid. You'll come across them easily and get rid of them with difficulty. They don't mind causing a hundred annoyances a day. They are quarrelsome by nature and so contradict everyone and everything. Their judgement is always back to front, and so they disapprove of everything. But the people who most try good sense are those who do nothing well and speak ill of everything. For there are many monsters in incongruity's vast territory.

222:

A person who is cautious is clearly prudent. The tongue is ferocious; once let loose, it's very difficult to chain it up again. Through its pulse the wise gauge the disposition of the soul, and the circumspect, the fluctuations of the heart. The problem is that the person who should be the most restrained is the least. The wise avoid irritations and difficulties, revealing how they have mastered themselves. They proceed circumspectly, Janus-like in their

impartiality, Argos-like[86] in their scrutiny. Better had Momus wanted eyes in people's hands than a window in their chests.[87]

223:

Don't be very idiosyncratic, whether through affectation or oversight. Some people are notably idiosyncratic with ridiculous mannerisms, which are defects rather than marks of distinction. And just as some are widely known for a particularly ugly facial feature, so these people are known for some excessive aspect of their behaviour. Being idiosyncratic only serves as a point of criticism, with each incongruous peculiarity provoking laughter in some and annoyance in others.

224:

Know how to take things: never the wrong way, even though that is how they may reach you. Everything has its right and wrong side. The best, most favourable thing will injure you if grasped by the blade, whilst the most unfavourable will defend you if grasped by the hilt. Many things that caused grief would have caused satisfaction if we'd considered their good side. There are advantages and disadvantages in everything; the skill is in knowing how to discover what is beneficial. The same thing appears very different when viewed in different lights: look at things in a good light. Don't confuse good and bad and rein in the wrong one. This is why some find contentment in everything, and others sorrow. This is a good

defence against the reversals of fortune and is a key rule in life, applicable at all times and in all occupations.

225:

Know your sovereign fault. There is no one whose outstanding quality is not without a counterweight, and if you incline towards it, it will seize power like a tyrant. Start by openly declaring war on it, and let the first step be exposing it, for once acknowledged, it will be defeated, especially if you form as clear an idea of it as your critics. To master yourself, you need to scrutinize yourself. Once this key imperfection is conquered, all the rest will be too.

226:

Be careful to oblige. Most don't talk or act according to who they are, but as they are obliged to. To persuade us of the bad anything will do, because the bad, even though sometimes incredible, is always believed. All we hold best and most important depends on the respect of others. Some are happy simply to be right, but this is not enough, for it needs to be helped along by diligence. Being obliging sometimes costs very little but is worth a great deal: deeds are bought with words. There's no object in this mansion of the universe so worthless that it's not needed once a year; although worth little, its absence would be sorely felt. In speaking of things, each person follows their feelings.

227:

Don't believe your first impression. Some people become so quickly wedded to the first piece of information they encounter that they only flirt with subsequent ones, and since lies always get in first, there's no room subsequently for the truth. The will shouldn't be fully taken with the first objective encountered, nor the understanding with the first proposition: this reveals complete shallowness. Some people are like new vessels that retain the flavour of the first liquid that fills them, whether good or bad. When such a limited capacity is known, this is damaging, for it gives an opportunity to sly malice: those with bad intentions can dye credulity whatever colour suits them. Let there always be room for a second look. Like Alexander, keep one ear for the accused.[88] Let there be room for second and third impressions. To form a quick impression suggests a lack of ability and is close to being ruled by your passions.

228:

Don't be a scandalmonger. Far less have a reputation as one, for this is to be famed for defaming. Don't be witty at another's expense: this is more hateful than difficult. Everyone will take revenge on you by speaking ill of you, and as you are only one and they are many, you'll be more quickly defeated than they'll be convinced. Something bad shouldn't cause pleasure or be commented upon. Gossips are always detested, and although the great sometimes

associate with them, this will be more because they enjoy their nonsense than because they value their good sense. And whoever speaks ill, always hears worse.

229:

Know how to divide up your life wisely, not as things arise, but with foresight and discrimination. Life is arduous without any breaks, like a long journey without any inns. Learned variety makes it pleasant. Spend the first part of a fine life in communication with the dead. We are born to know and to know ourselves, and books reliably turn us into people. Spend the second part with the living: see and examine all that's good in the world. Not everything can be found in one country; the universal Father has shared out his gifts and sometimes endows the ugliest with the most. Let the third stage be spent entirely with yourself: the ultimate happiness, to philosophize.

230:

Open your eyes in time. Not everyone who sees has opened their eyes, and not everyone who looks, sees. To realize something too late doesn't bring help, just sorrow. Some only start to see when there's nothing left to see; they've already lost everything before they've found themselves. It's hard to give understanding to someone lacking will, and even more will to someone lacking understanding. Those all around play Blind Man's Buff with them, to

everyone's amusement. And being deaf to advice, they don't open their eyes to see. There's never a shortage of those who encourage this lack of sense, for they only thrive because others don't. Unhappy the horse whose owner cannot see: it will go hungry.

231:

Never let something be seen half done. Let things be enjoyed in all their perfection. All beginnings are formless, and the image of that deformity lingers. The memory of having seen something imperfect prevents our enjoying it once it is perfected. To enjoy something great in one go satisfies our taste, even though it hinders an appreciation of its parts. Before they are something, all things are nothing, and as they start to be, they are still little better than nothing. Seeing even the most exquisite food being cooked dampens rather than whets the appetite. Every great master should take care that their works are not seen in embryonic form; learn from nature never to show them until they are fit to appear.

232:

Be a little practical. Not everything should be speculation, there should also be action. Very wise people are easy to deceive, for although they know extraordinary things, they are ignorant of the ordinary business of living, which is more necessary. For them, contemplation of sublime matters leaves no room for mundane ones, and as they don't know the thing that's most important to

know – which everyone else is highly skilled in – they are either admired or thought ignorant by the superficial rabble. The wise man should therefore try to be practical, enough so as not to be deceived or even laughed at. He should be concerned with what is feasible, because although this isn't the highest thing in life, it's the most necessary. What use is knowledge, if it isn't practical? And today, knowing how to live is true knowledge.[89]

233:

Don't get other people's taste wrong, causing aggravation rather than pleasure. Through not understanding people's character, some people annoy by doing what they think will be obliging. What flatters some, offends others, and what someone thinks a service is an insult. It can sometimes cost more upsetting someone than it would have cost to please them. People miss out on gratitude and recompense because they miss their way in trying to please. If you don't know someone's character, you will hardly be able to satisfy them. This is why some people think they are offering praise when they are actually being insulting – though this is a well-deserved rebuke. Others think their eloquence entertains, but their loquacity actually crushes the spirit.

234:

Don't entrust your reputation to another without having their honour as security. Keeping silent should be to each other's advantage;

speaking out to each other's detriment. Where honour is concerned, dealings must cut both ways, so that each looks after the other's reputation. You should never trust anyone; and if on occasion you have to, do so with such skill that you encourage caution even more than prudence. The risk should be equal and the matter mutual, so that someone who says they're your partner doesn't turn witness against you.

235:

Know how to ask. There's nothing more difficult for some, or more easy for others. There are some who don't know how to refuse; with such people, no picklock is necessary. There are others whose first word on every occasion is 'no'; with these people, you need real skill. And with everyone, the right moment: catch them when they're in good spirits, when their bodies or their minds are satisfied. Unless the listener's careful attention detects the petitioner's subtlety, then happy days are the days when favours are granted, for inner happiness streams outwards. Don't go near when you see someone else has been refused, for any fear of saying 'no' will have vanished. There's no good time when people are down. Placing someone under an obligation beforehand is a good bill of exchange, unless you're dealing with someone base.

236:

Grant something as a favour before it has to be given as a reward. This is a skill of great politicians. Granting favours before they are merited is proof of an honourable person. A favour in advance is doubly excellent: the speed of the giver places the recipient under a greater obligation. A gift given afterwards is due payment; the same beforehand becomes an obligation. This is a subtle way of transforming obligations, for what was for the superior an obligation to reward becomes for the recipient an obligation to repay. This is the case with honourable people. With base individuals, a reward paid early is more of a bit than a spur.

237:

Never share secrets with superiors. Supping at their table can leave a bitter taste. Many have perished through being confidants. They are like the bread we use to mop up our food, and risk sharing the same fate. The prince doesn't bestow a favour in sharing a secret, but a heavy toll. Many people smash their mirror because it reminds them of their ugliness. A person can't bear to see someone who has seen them as they are, and someone who has seen us at our worst is never well regarded. Don't place anyone under too much of an obligation, least of all a powerful person; and let it be for services done rather than favours received. Confidences between friends are especially dangerous. Whoever has told their secrets to another has become their slave. For sovereigns, this is unnatural and cannot last. They want to recover their lost freedom, and will ride roughshod

over everything to do so, even reason. Secrets: don't listen to them or tell them.

238:

Know what you lack. Many an individual would be a truly rounded person if they weren't lacking that something without which they'll never reach the height of perfection. With some you can see they'd amount to something if they paid attention to a few small things. Some lack gravity, and this tarnishes their talents; others lack gentleness, something colleagues immediately miss, and especially in those in important positions. Some need speed of execution, others, more restraint. All these flaws, if they are noticed, can easily be made good, for care can make habit a second nature.

239:

Don't be too sharp. It's more important to be prudent. To know more than is advisable is to be too clever for your own good, for subtleties usually lose their point. The well-established truth is safer. It's good to have understanding, but not to be garrulous. Endless debate is a form of quarrelling. Better a good, solid judgement that reasons no further than is necessary.

240:

Know how to appear the fool. The wisest sometimes play this card, and there are times when the greatest knowledge consists in appearing to lack knowledge. You mustn't be ignorant, just feign ignorance. With fools, being wise counts for little, and similarly with madmen, being sane: you need to talk to everyone in their own language. The person who feigns stupidity isn't a fool, just the person who suffers from it. Whilst real stupidity is just simple, feigned stupidity isn't, for genuine artifice is involved here. The only way to be well loved is to put on the skin of the most stupid of animals.

241:

Take a joke, but don't make someone the butt of one. The first is a form of politeness; the second, of audacity. Whoever gets annoyed at some fun appears even more like a beast than they actually are. An excellent joke is enjoyable; to know how to take one is a mark of real character. Getting annoyed simply prompts others to poke fun again and again. Know how far to take a joke, and the safest thing is not to start one. The greatest truths have always arisen from jokes. Nothing demands greater care and skill: before making a joke, know just how far someone can take one.

242:

Carry things through. Some people put everything into the beginning, and finish nothing. They come up with something, but never press

on with it, revealing their fickle character. They never receive any praise because they don't press on with anything; everything ends with nothing being ended. In others, this arises out of impatience, a characteristic vice of the Spanish, just as patience is a virtue of the Belgians.[90] The latter finish things, the former finish with them. They sweat until a difficulty is overcome, and are happy simply to conquer it, but they don't know how to carry their victory through; they show they have the ability, but not the desire. This is always a defect, arising from taking on the impossible or from fickleness. If an undertaking is good, why not finish it? And if it's bad, why was it started? The shrewd should kill their prey, not give up after flushing it out.[91]

243:

Don't be completely dove-like. Let the craftiness of the snake alternate with the simplicity of the dove.[92] There's nothing easier than deceiving a good person. The person who never lies is more ready to believe, and one who never deceives is more trusting. Being deceived is not always the result of stupidity, but sometimes of simple goodness. Two types of people often foresee danger: those who have learnt from experience, very much to their own cost, and the astute, very much to the cost of others. Let shrewdness be as versed in suspicion as astuteness is in intrigue, and don't try to be so good that you create opportunities for someone else to be bad. Be a

combination of the dove and the serpent; not a monster, but a prodigy.

244:

Know how to put someone under an obligation. Some transform a favour received into one given and it seems, or they lead others to understand, that they are granting a favour rather than receiving one. There are people so expert that they grant an honour in making a request, and turn their own interest into an honour conferred. Reversing obligations with extraordinary skill, they arrange things such that it appears as if others, in granting something, are paying their due. At the very least, they put in doubt who is doing whom a favour. They buy the best with their praise alone, and by revealing their liking for something, they bestow honour and flattery. They place politeness under an obligation, turning what should be their own gratitude into another's debt to them. In this way, they switch the verb 'oblige' from passive to active, being better politicians than grammarians. This reveals great subtlety, but greater still would be seeing through this, undoing the trick, handing back the supposed honour, and letting each party receive their due.

245:

Sometimes reason in a singular and out-of-the-ordinary way. It indicates superior ability. Don't value people who never oppose you; this is

not a sign of love for you, but of love for themselves. Don't allow yourself to be deceived by praise; condemn it, don't respond in kind. Consider it an honour to be criticized, especially by those who speak ill of good people. It should pain you if all your actions please everyone, for this is a sign that they're not good: perfection belongs to the few.

246:

Don't offer an apology to someone who hasn't asked for one. And even if one is asked for, an over-the-top apology is like an admission of guilt. To apologize before it's necessary is to accuse yourself, and to be bled when healthy is to attract ill health and ill will. An excuse in advance awakens suspicion. Nor should a sensible person reveal their awareness of someone else's suspicions – this is to go looking for offence. They should try instead to refute these with the honesty of their actions.

247:

Know a little more and live a little less. Others argue the opposite. Well-spent leisure is worth more than work. We have nothing of our own but time, which even the homeless can inhabit. Wasting precious life on mechanical tasks is as unfortunate as wasting too much of it on great ones. You shouldn't be burdened with business or envy; this is to crowd out life and stifle the spirit. Some extend this to knowledge itself, but a life without knowledge is not a life.

248:

Don't be carried away by the last person you meet. There are people who believe the last thing they hear, stupidity always going to one extreme or the other.[93] Their feelings and desires are wax: the most recent thing stamps itself upon them and effaces everything else. They are never fully won over because they are just as easily lost: anyone can dye them to match their own colour. They make bad confidants and remain forever like children: with their opinions and emotions ever changing, and their will and judgement crippled, they veer along, tilting this way and that.

249:

Don't start to live just when life has to end. Some people take a rest at the beginning and leave hard work until the end. But what is essential must come first and only later, if there's time, what is incidental. Others want to triumph before they have fought. In acquiring knowledge, some start with what is least important, leaving the honourable and useful subjects for when life is at its end. Others haven't even started to be a success when they are already boasting of it. For knowledge and life, method is essential.

250:

When should you reason in reverse? When someone speaks to us with malicious intent. With some individuals, everything must be taken

the opposite way: yes is no and no is yes. To talk ill of something is an expression of esteem for it, for if someone wants something themselves, they run it down to everyone else. Not all praise involves speaking honestly, for some, not wanting to praise the good, also praise the bad; and for someone for whom nobody is bad, nobody will be good.

251:

Human means must be sought as if there were no divine ones, and divine ones as if there were no human ones. The rule of a great master.[94] No further comment is necessary.

252:

Neither entirely selfish, nor entirely altruistic. Both are a vulgar form of tyranny. Being entirely out for yourself leads to wanting all things for yourself. Such people don't know how to yield on the slightest thing or how to forgo a fraction of their own comfort. They are rarely obliging and trust their own good fortune, and such support usually fails them. Sometimes it's as well to be on the side of other people, so they will be on yours. Whoever has a public role must be the public's slave, otherwise give up the office as well as the burden, as the old woman said to Hadrian.[95] In contrast, some live entirely for others, for stupidity always takes things to excess – here, of unhappiness. They don't have a day or even an hour for themselves, and are so completely given to others that they belong

to everybody but themselves. Even understanding is affected: they know everything to help others, but nothing to help themselves. A circumspect person should realize that nobody seeks you for your own sake; what they seek in and through you are their own interests.

253:

Don't express an idea too plainly. Most people don't value what they understand, and what they can't grasp, they venerate. To be valued, things must cost us: something will be celebrated when it's not understood. To gain respect, you should always show yourself to be wiser and more prudent than is required by the person you're dealing with, but within moderation, not excessively so. And whilst common sense is worth a great deal among knowledgeable people, something loftier is required for the majority. You mustn't give them a chance to criticize, so make them spend all their time trying to understand you. Many will praise something without being able to say why when asked, for anything recondite, being mysterious, is revered and people will praise it because they hear it praised.

254:

Don't dismiss something bad because it's minor, for bad things never come in ones but are linked together, just like blessings. Fortune and misfortune usually go where there is more of the same. Everyone flees an unlucky person and rushes to a lucky one. Even

doves, in their simplicity, flock to the whitest tower. Everything ends up failing someone who is unlucky: consolation, reason, their very self. Don't waken misfortune when it sleeps. A slip is a minor thing, but a fatal fall will follow and you won't know where this will end, for just as nothing good is ever entirely perfect, nothing bad ever entirely ends. Patience for heaven-sent misfortunes; prudence for those from here below.

255:

Know how to do good: in small amounts, and often. An obligation should never be greater than someone's ability to fulfil it. Whoever gives a great deal is not giving but selling. Gratitude should not be placed in an impossible position; if it is, relations will be broken off. All it takes to lose many people is to place them under too much of an obligation: being unable to fulfil it, they'll back away, and since they are under it, they'll end up as enemies. The idol never wants to see before it the sculptor who created it, nor does someone under an obligation want to see their benefactor. The subtle art of giving: it should cost little, but be greatly desired, and hence greatly appreciated.

256:

Always be forearmed: against the discourteous, the obstinate, the vain and every kind of fool. There are many all around, and good sense consists in not being around them. Look in caution's mirror[96]

every day and arm yourself with firm intentions and you will overcome anything stupidity throws at you. Be on the alert and your reputation won't be exposed to vulgar chance: a man forearmed with good sense will not be assailed by such misfits. The course of human affairs is difficult since it's full of reefs that endanger reputation. To go off course is the safest way, following the astuteness of Ulysses.[97] Artful evasion is very useful here. Above all, be courteous, for this is the only quick way out of many undertakings.

257:

Never break off relations, because reputation is always damaged by this. Anyone makes a good enemy, not so a friend; few can do good, but almost everyone harm. The day the eagle broke with the beetle, its nest wasn't safe even in Jupiter's bosom.[98] Hidden enemies, who wait for such opportunities, use a declared enemy to stoke the fires for them. Former friends make the worst enemies: they lay the blame for their misplaced esteem on your failings. Those looking on speak as they think and think as they wish, condemning both sides either for lacking foresight at the start of the friendship or for precipitousness at its end, and for lacking good sense in both instances. If a break is necessary, let it be forgivable, done with a cooling of favour, not a violent rage. The saying concerning a graceful retreat is relevant here.

258:

Look for someone to help you shoulder misfortunes. You will never be alone, especially in risky undertakings; to be so would be to bear all the opprobrium. Some people think to take all the responsibility, and take all the criticism. You will have someone to free you from trouble or to help you shoulder it. Neither fortune nor the rabble are as ready to take on two people. This is why the shrewd doctor, whose cure was mistaken, is not mistaken in seeking someone who, under the guise of further consultation, can help carry the coffin. Share the burden and the sorrow, for misfortune borne alone is twice as intolerable.

259:

Anticipate offences and turn them into favours. It's shrewder to avoid them than to avenge them. A great skill is to turn a potential rival into a confidant, to turn those who threatened to attack your reputation into its defenders. Knowing how to place someone under an obligation is very valuable: a person has no time for insults if they're occupied with gratitude. And to turn sorrows into pleasures is to know how to live. Turn ill will itself into a confidant.

260:

You will never belong entirely to someone else nor they to you. Neither ties of blood, nor friendship, nor the most pressing obligation are

sufficient for this, for there's a big difference between opening your heart and surrendering your will. Even the greatest intimacy has its limits, and the laws of courtesy are not offended by this. A friend always keeps some secret to himself and a son conceals something from his father. You conceal things from some people that you reveal to others, and vice versa, and by thus distinguishing between people, you end up revealing everything and withholding everything.

261:

Don't persist in folly. Some make a duty out of a mistake and, having started to err, believe it a mark of constancy to carry on doing so. Inwardly they accuse themselves of error, but outwardly excuse this, so that if, when they started to act stupidly, they were held to be careless, by continuing this way they are confirmed as fools. Neither an ill-considered promise nor a mistaken resolution carries any obligation. But some people continue their initial mistake and persevere with their stupidity: they want to be true to their error.

262:

Know how to forget. This is more a matter of luck than skill. The things which should most be forgotten are the ones most remembered. Not only is memory base in failing when it's most needed, but stupid in turning up when it's best not to: it's meticulous with things that cause sorrow, and carefree with those

that cause pleasure. Sometimes the remedy for misfortune consists in forgetting it – but we forget the remedy. It's therefore best to train our memory in good habits, because it can give us happiness or hell. The contented are an exception here, for in their state of innocence they enjoy their simple happiness.

263:

Many pleasurable things don't have to belong to you. They are more enjoyable when they belong to others. The first day the pleasure is all for the owner, after that, for others. Things belonging to other people are twice as pleasurable, with no risk of loss and all the pleasure of novelty. Deprivation makes everything taste better, even water belonging to another seems like nectar.[99] Possession, besides diminishing enjoyment, increases annoyance, whether from lending things or not. It amounts to maintaining them for others, and you'll create more enemies than appreciative people.

264:

Don't have careless days. Luck likes playing a trick and will rush at any chance to catch you unawares. Ingenuity, good sense, valour and even beauty should always be ready for the test, because the day they feel too confident will be the day they are discredited. Care is always absent when most needed, for not thinking trips us up. An attentive person's strategy is usually to catch our best qualities off guard so as rigorously to evaluate us. The astute,

knowing the days when a person is on show, pass over these and choose the least expected day to test someone's worth.

265:

Know how to really challenge your subordinates. An opportune challenge has turned many into fully rounded individuals, just as nearly drowning creates good swimmers. In this way many people discovered courage, and even knowledge, which would have remained buried in reticence if an opportunity hadn't presented itself. Difficult situations are opportunities for renown, and someone noble can do the work of a thousand if their honour is at risk. This particular lesson, like all others, was known superlatively well by the Catholic monarch Isabella, and the Great Captain[100] owed his renown, and many others their eternal fame, to her judicious favour. With such subtlety, she made great individuals.

266:

Don't be bad by being totally good. As someone is who never gets angry. Those who are insensible are hardly real people. This doesn't always stem from insensibility, but from stupidity. An opportunely expressed feeling is what makes us human. Birds quickly mock scarecrows. To alternate bitter and sweet is proof of good taste; sweetness alone is for children and fools. It's a great misfortune to lose yourself through being totally good in this state of insensibility.

267:

Silken words, and a mild nature. Arrows pierce the body, but harsh words the soul. A pill can make your breath smell sweet, and to know how to sell air is one of life's subtlest skills. Most things are bought with words, and they're enough to achieve the impossible. All our dealings are in air, and the breath of a prince greatly inspires. So your mouth should always be full of sugar to sweeten your words so that they taste good even to your enemies. The only way to be loved is to be sweet-natured.

268:

The sensible person does at the beginning what the fool does in the end. Each one does the same, the only difference being their timing, the former opportune, the latter not. Someone whose understanding is back to front from the start will continue in the same way: they trample underfoot what should be borne in mind, take left for right, and their every act is maladroit. There's only one way for the penny to drop.[101] Fools do by compulsion what they could have done by choice, but those with discretion immediately see what must be done sooner or later, and do it with pleasure and to their credit.

269:

Take advantage of your novelty. For whilst you're new, you'll be valued. Novelty, because it offers variety, is universally pleasing;

taste is refreshed, and something ordinary but brand new is more highly valued than something extraordinary but familiar. All excellence loses its lustre and ends up looking old. Note that novelty's glory will not last long: within a few days, all regard for it will be gone. So know how to take advantage of those first fruits of esteem and get whatever you can from the fleeting pleasure you cause, because when the heat of novelty fades, enthusiasm will turn cold, and pleasure in the new will turn into boredom with the familiar. Recognize that everything also once had its moment, and that this passed away.

270:

Don't be the only person to condemn what pleases many. There's something good about it since it pleases so many, and although it can't be explained, it's enjoyed. Singularity is always odious, and ridiculous when mistaken. It will discredit your own opinion rather than the object condemned; you'll stand alone with your bad taste. If you don't know how to find what's good, conceal your shortcoming, and don't issue a wholesale condemnation, for bad taste normally arises out of ignorance. What everyone says, either is, or seeks to be.

271:

Someone who knows little should keep to what's safest in any profession. Although they won't be thought sharp, they will be thought sound.

Someone who has knowledge can take a chance and act on a whim, but to know little and to take a gamble is to voluntarily crash and fall. Keep on the safe side, since what's well established cannot fail. If knowledge is minimal, stick to the main track. According to the rules of both knowledge and ignorance, being safe is more sensible than being singular.

272:

When selling, let your price be that there is no price: such courtesy gives rise to a far greater obligation. An interested party's request will never exhaust what an honourable person under an obligation will give. Courtesy doesn't give, it imposes an obligation, and generosity is the greatest form of obligation. Nothing costs honourable people more than something they're freely given: its value and the act of courtesy mean it's sold twice and paid for twice. The truth is that gallantry is gibberish to the rabble, because they don't understand the terms of good behaviour.

273:

Understand the temperaments of those you deal with, in order to know their intentions. When the cause is fully known, so is the effect, which is deduced first from the cause and then from the motive. The melancholic always predicts disaster, and the slanderer, faults; they always see the worst and, not perceiving the good actually before them, foresee only possible misfortune. Those influenced by passion

never talk of things as they actually are: passion speaks through them, not reason. And similarly each according to his temper or humour, and all far from the truth. Know how to decipher expressions and interpret the soul in outward signs; recognize that the person always laughing has something missing, and that the one who never laughs is false; be cautious of someone inquisitive, because they are either talkative or fault-finding; expect little good from the unattractive, for such people usually avenge themselves on nature, respecting it little because it has so little respected them. Stupidity and attractiveness are usually exactly matched.

274:

Have appeal. It casts a polite and politic spell. Let such gallant allure be used more to win goodwill than personal advantage – or use it for everything. Merit alone is not enough without charm, which is what leads to approval, sovereignty's most useful instrument. To win someone over is a matter of luck, though artifice can help this along, for artifice works best where natural gifts are already found. This gives rise to affection, and eventually to universal favour.

275:

Go with the flow, but not beyond decency. Don't always be affectedly solemn and annoyed. This is part of good manners. To gain everyone's affection, you must dispense with a little dignity. You can sometimes follow the crowd, but not into indecency, for

whoever is taken for a fool in public will never be thought wise in private. More is lost in one day of relaxation than was ever gained with seriousness. But don't always stand out from the rest: to be an exception is to condemn everyone else. Far less affect fastidiousness – leave that to women. Even in spiritual matters, this is ridiculous. The best thing about a man is acting like a man. Whilst a woman can gracefully affect a manly air, the reverse is never the case.

276:

Know how to renew your character using nature and art. They say that our nature changes every seven years: let this improve and enhance your taste. After the first seven years we gain the use of reason; let there be a new perfection with each successive period. Observe this natural process to help it along, and expect others to improve as well. Thus many change their behaviour with their status or position, and sometimes this is not noticed until the full extent of such a change is apparent. At twenty, a person is a peacock; at thirty, a lion; at forty, a camel; at fifty, a snake; at sixty, a dog; at seventy, a monkey; and at eighty, nothing.[102]

277:

Show yourself off. It allows your qualities to shine. Each of these has its moment: seize it, for none can triumph every day. There are splendid individuals in whom the least accomplishment shines greatly and the greatest dazzles, provoking wonder. When display is

joined to eminence, it's held to be prodigious. There are showy nations, and the Spanish surpass all in this. Light came first to enable all creation to shine. Display causes great satisfaction, makes good what's missing, and gives everything a second being, especially when grounded in reality. Heaven, which gives perfection, provides for its display, for one without the other would be unnatural. There's an art to all display; even what's truly excellent depends on circumstance and isn't always opportune. When the time isn't right, then display misfires. No quality should be less without affectation, and this always causes its downfall, since display is always close to vanity, and vanity to contempt. It should always be restrained so as not to end up being vulgar, and among the wise, excess has always been somewhat disparaged. It often consists in an eloquent silence, in a nonchalant show of perfection, for deft concealment is the most praiseworthy type of display, an apparent lack inciting profound curiosity. It's a great skill not to reveal perfection in its entirety straight off, but rather gradually to display it. Let one quality be a guarantee of a greater one, and applause for the first, an expectation of those to follow.

278:

Avoid being noted, for in attracting attention, qualities themselves become defects. Attention arises from singularity, which has always been censured; someone singular stands alone. Even attractiveness, if it stands out, is discreditable. It causes offence by drawing

attention to itself – disreputable peculiarities even more so. But some people want to be known for their very vices, seeking something novel in villainy so as to be famous for infamy. Even with intelligence, excess degenerates into quibbling.

279:

Don't respond to contradiction. It's necessary to distinguish whether it arises from astuteness or vulgarity. It's not always a challenge, but sometimes a trick. Take care, then, not to get involved in the one or to fall headlong into the other. Care is nowhere better spent than on such spies; and against picklocks of the mind, there's no better counter-ploy than to leave caution's key in the lock.

280:

An honourable person. Honest conduct is at an end, obligations are never met, few dealings are true: the least reward for the greatest service, this is now the practice everywhere. There are whole nations inclined to false conduct: from some, treachery is always feared; from others, fickleness; and from yet others, deceit. Don't let the bad ways of others serve as an example, but as a note of caution. Proximity to despicable behaviour risks destroying integrity. But the honourable man never forgets who he is because of what others are.

281:

The approval of knowledgeable people. A lukewarm 'yes' from an outstanding man is worth more than the applause of the rabble, whose belches don't inspire. The wise speak with understanding and so their praise causes unending satisfaction. Judicious Antigonus reduced the entire audience of his fame to one man, Zeno,[103] and Plato called Aristotle his entire school. Some only care about filling their stomachs, swallowing even complete rubbish. Even princes need those who write, and they fear their pens more than ugly women fear artists' brushes.

282:

Use absence, for either respect or regard. If presence diminishes fame, absence increases it. An individual when absent is taken for a lion; when present, for that ridiculous offspring of the mountains, a mouse.[104] Talents lose their lustre close up, because the outer surface is seen before the inner depths. Imagination outstrips sight, and deceit, which normally enters through the ears, ends up leaving through the eyes. Someone who remains distant behind their renown maintains their reputation, for even the phoenix takes advantage of absence and desire to increase its esteem and regard.

283:

Be sensibly inventive. It indicates extreme ingenuity, but what would it be without an ounce of madness?[105] Inventiveness is characteristic of the ingenious; choosing well, of the prudent. It's a gift, and very

rare, because many manage to choose well, but few are truly inventive, and those few are always first in excellence and in history. Novelty is pleasing and, if apt, doubles the lustre of what's good. In matters of judgement, it's dangerous, because it involves going against opinion; in matters of ingenuity, it's praiseworthy; and when they are fitting, both are greatly acclaimed.

284:

Don't meddle, and you won't be spurned. Respect yourself, if you want to be respected. Be sparing rather than lavish with your presence. Arrive when wanted, and you'll be well received; never come unless called, nor go unless sent. Someone who gets involved on their own initiative receives all the ill-will if they fail, and none of the thanks if they succeed. A meddler is the target of scorn, and since they brazenly interfere, they are discarded ignominiously.

285:

Don't perish from someone else's misfortune. Know who is in the mire, and expect them to demand you console them by sharing their adversity. They're looking for someone to help shoulder their misfortune, and those who turned their backs on you when things were going well, now stretch out their hands. Great care is needed with those who are drowning so that helping them doesn't endanger you.

286:

Don't allow yourself to be under an obligation, either wholly or to everyone. This is to be a slave, and everyone's. Some were born more fortunate than others, the former to do good, the latter to receive it. Freedom is more precious than a gift, which causes us to lose it. Be more pleased that many individuals depend on you than that you depend on one individual. Being in command has no other advantage than the power to do more good. Above all, don't believe it a favour to be placed under an obligation; more often than not someone has astutely engineered this to win you over.

287:

Never act when passions are inflamed. You'll get everything wrong. You can't act for yourself if you're not in control of yourself, and passion always banishes reason. When this happens, use a prudent third party; if they're dispassionate, their prudence is guaranteed. Those who are watching a game always see more than those who are playing because they don't get excited. When you know you're agitated, let good sense sound the retreat before your blood boils and you create a bloody mess, for in an instant you'll provide days of gossip for others and of turmoil for yourself.

288:

Live as circumstances demand. Ruling, reasoning, everything must be opportune. Act when you can, for time and tide wait for no one. To live, don't follow generalizations, except where virtue is concerned, and don't insist on precise rules for desire, for you'll have to drink tomorrow the water you shunned today. There are some so outlandishly misguided that they expect all circumstances necessary for success to conform to their own whims, not the reverse.[106] But the wise know that the lodestar of prudence is to behave as circumstances demand.

289:

The greatest stigma for a person is revealing that's all they are. People stop considering them divine the moment they appear all too human. Frivolity is completely at odds with reputation. Just as the reserved man is held to be more than a man, so the frivolous one is held to be less than one. There's no flaw that brings greater discredit, for frivolity is opposed to gravity. A frivolous person can have no real substance, especially if they're very old, since age demands good sense. And although this blemish is very widespread, it's always particularly discreditable.

290:

To combine esteem and affection is a real blessing.[107] To maintain respect, don't be greatly loved. Love is more brazen than hate. Fondness and veneration don't sit well together. You should be

neither greatly feared nor greatly loved. Love leads to familiarity, and when this makes its appearance, esteem departs. Be loved with appreciation rather than affection, for such love is a mark of great people.

291:

Know how to appraise. Let the observation of the judicious vie with the reserve of the cautious. You need great judgement of your own to measure someone else's. It's more important to know the characters and properties of people than of plants and minerals. This is one of life's subtlest activities. Metals are recognized through their ring, people through their speech. Words reveal someone's integrity, but deeds even more so. What is needed here is extraordinary reflection, profound observation, subtle scrutiny and judicious analysis.

292:

Let your natural talents overcome the demands of the job, not the other way round. However great the position, a person must show that they are greater still. Real ability keeps on growing and dazzling with each new situation. Someone who lacks spirit will soon be overwhelmed and will be broken eventually by their duties and reputation. The great Augustus[108] took pride in being a greater man than he was a prince. Nobility of spirit is beneficial here, and even sensible self-confidence.

293:

On maturity. It shines forth in your bearing, but more so in your manners. Weight makes gold precious, and moral weight a person: it dignifies our qualities and provokes veneration. Demeanour is the soul's façade. It isn't a sedate stupidity, as the superficial think, but a calm authority: its words are sententious, its actions unerring. It bespeaks a fully formed individual, for it's maturity that makes you a true person. In ceasing to act like a child, someone starts to be serious and to have authority.

294:

Moderation in forming opinions. Everyone forms ideas as they see fit and has abundant reasons for their views. In most people, judgement yields to feeling. Often two people meet who have opposite views, and each thinks reason is on their side, but reason, ever true, never serves two masters. A wise person should proceed cautiously in such a delicate situation. Cast doubt on your own position and so reform your opinion of your opponent's. You should see things on occasion from the other's point of view and examine their reasons. You'll thereby neither condemn the other person, nor defend yourself so blindly.

295:

Heroic, not histrionic. The people who really flaunt things are those who have least reason to. With real stupidity, they turn everything into a mystery; chameleons[109] of applause, they give everyone endless cause for laughter. Vanity has always been annoying; in these situations, it's laughable. Such tiny ants of honour, crawling after the glory of great deeds. Make least fuss of your greatest gifts. Be content simply to act, and leave talking to others. Undertake deeds, don't sell them. Don't hire golden pens to write garbage, thereby disgusting good sense. Seek to be heroic, rather than simply to appear so.

296:

A man of many, and truly majestic, qualities. Great qualities make a great person: a single great quality is the equivalent of many mediocre ones. One person wanted everything around them to be impressive, even everyday things.[110] How much better for a great man to endeavour that his inner qualities are thus. In God, everything is infinite, everything immense; similarly in heroes, everything should be great and majestic, so that all their actions, and even their words, may be clothed in a transcendent, grandiose majesty.

297:

Act as though always on view. The insightful man is the one who sees that others see or will see him. He knows that walls have ears, and

that what's badly done is always bursting to come out. Even when alone, he acts as though seen by everyone, knowing that everything will eventually be known. He looks on those who will subsequently hear of his actions as witnesses to them already. The person who wanted everyone to see him wasn't daunted that others could see into his house from outside.[111]

298:

Three things make a prodigy, and are the greatest gift of supreme bounty: a fertile intellect, sound judgement, and outstandingly excellent taste. To form ideas well is a great advantage, but better to reason well. Such is the good person's understanding. The intellect doesn't need a strong back – it's not supposed to be laborious, but sharp. To think correctly is the fruit of rationality. At twenty, the will reigns; at thirty, intellect; at forty, judgement. There are minds that can see clearly like the eyes of the lynx, and that reason best when things are obscure. There are others that reason on the spot and always hit upon what's most opportune. Many things occur to them, and correctly: a fertile blessing. But good taste flavours everything in life.

299:

Leave people hungry: nectar should only ever brush the lips. Desire is the measure of esteem. Even with physical thirst, good taste's trick is to stimulate it, not quench it. What's good, if sparse is twice as

good. The second time around, there's a sharp decline. A surfeit of pleasure is dangerous, for it occasions disdain even towards what's undisputedly excellent. The only rule in pleasing is to seize upon an appetite already whetted. If you must annoy it, do so through impatient desire rather than wearisome pleasure. Hard-won happiness is twice as enjoyable.

300:

In a word, a saint, which says it once and for all. Virtue links all perfections and is the centre of all happiness. It makes a person prudent, circumspect, shrewd, sensible, wise, brave, restrained, upright, happy, praiseworthy, a true and comprehensive hero. Three S's make someone blessed: being saintly, sound and sage.[112] Virtue is the sun of the little world of man and its hemisphere is a clear conscience. It is so fine, it gains the favour of both God and mankind. Nothing is worthy of love but virtue, nor of hate but vice. Virtue alone is real, everything else a mere jest. Ability and greatness must be measured by virtue, not by good fortune. It alone is self-sufficient. Whilst someone is alive, it makes them worthy of love; when dead, of being remembered.

Notes

1. *seven in years gone by*: A reference to the seven sages of Greece; who these were varies, but Plato (*Protagoras*) lists Thales, Pittacus, Bias, Solon, Cleobulus, Myson and Chilon.
2. *inclination and ingenuity*: The Spanish terms used, *genio* and *ingenio*, are central to Gracián's thought and are often paired, as here. *Genio* is 'temperament', 'aptitude', 'disposition', 'character'. *Ingenio*, a power of the understanding marked by its sharpness, inventiveness, ingeniousness and quick-wittedness, is normally translated here as 'ingenuity' or 'intellect', but always with this range of qualities implied.
3. *an image is made sacred*: Martial, *Epigrams*, VIII.xxiv.
4. *craftiness of Python*: Mythical snake killed by Apollo at Delphi.
5. *conquered kings as his servants*: For this anecdote about Tigranes of Armenia, 'King of Kings', see Plutarch, *Life of Lucullus*, XXI. 4–5.
6. *seven arts*: Grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, mathematics, music, geometry and astrology.
7. *one cloud to eclipse the sun*: An image standardly used in seventeenth-century wife-murder plays to convey how honour can be tarnished in appearance, if not in reality.
8. *his natural defect*: His baldness (Suetonius, *Life of Caesar*, XLV.2).
9. *moral sense*: The word used here is '*synteresis*'. Called the spark of conscience by Jerome, *synteresis* is described by Aquinas as inciting us to good and warning us against evil (ST, I, q.79a.12) and as moving or driving prudence (ST, II–II, q.47a.6). In seventeenth-century Spain, it was held to be a natural virtue of the soul, giving both awareness and understanding of moral principles necessary for a good life. Aphorism 96 is a definition of *synteresis*.
10. *please the masses*: Seneca quotes approvingly Epicurus as saying 'I have never wished to please the crowd' (*Letters*, 29.10). Horace (*Odes*, III.1) also writes of shunning the masses.
11. *chameleons*: Gracián invokes the once-held belief that chameleons lived on air.

12. *reason of state*: A highly controversial doctrine attributed to Machiavelli (1469–1527), according to which the state's interests come before the dictates of religion or morality. It was vilified by most political theorists. Here, to be seen to lack integrity would break one of the 'rules' of reason of state, namely that it is important that the prince always appear to be virtuous.
13. *Hippocrates for health … Seneca for good sense*: Synonymous with medical knowledge and moral wisdom respectively. Tacitus (*Annals*, vi.46) describes Tiberius laughing at doctors and at those over thirty who seek advice on what is good for them.
14. *love, in order to be loved*: Seneca, *Letters*, 9.6.
15. *a fable for the discreet*: As Romera-Navarro suggests (p. 106), this is an allusion to Aesop's fable of the fox who, finding an actor's mask, declares how fine it is but that it lacks a brain. This is also the subject of one of the emblems of Alciato (1492–1550), '*Mentem, non formam plus pollere*' ('Brains are worth more than beauty').
16. *as soon as they see someone, they understand and evaluate their very essence*: Luís Gonçalves da Câmara (1519/20–75) records this as one of the great skills of St Ignatius. See *Memories of Ignatius*, no. 199.
17. *Seneca's imaginary tutor*: Your conscience. A reference to Seneca, *Letters*, 43.5.
18. *he who left nothing … many things*: Much of this aphorism is drawn from chapter xxi of Gracián's *The Man of Discretion* and, on the basis of a comment attributed to him there, this is a reference to Alexander the Great. Plutarch (*Sayings of Kings and Commanders*, 207d) cites Augustus' rejoinder to Alexander who, having conquered so much by the age of thirty-two, didn't know what to do with the rest of his life.
19. *make haste slowly*: Gracián gives a translation of the famous motto '*festina lente*', used by Augustus (hence the adjective 'august'). See Suetonius, *Life of Augustus*, xxv.4 and Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, X.xi.5. The aphorism as a whole considers an aspect of prudence discussed by Aquinas (ST, II–II, q.47a.9) and summarized in his citation of Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.9, 1142b): deliberate slowly, but then act quickly.
20. *antiperistasis*: When one thing creates a reaction in its opposite.
21. *Pay attention … entrance*: Compare Ecclesiastes 7:8.
22. *moral sense: Synteresis*, on which see note 9.
23. *fame is entailed*: Gracián increases the impact of the aphorism on his projected elite readers by illustrating his point with a reference to the *mayorazgo*, the system whereby entailed estates were handed down by primogeniture, leaving little or nothing for other children.

24. *Lucina*: The Roman goddess of childbirth.
25. *his of poison*: Mithridates the Great, King of Pontus, took daily doses of poison to make himself immune to poisoning (see, e.g., Pliny, *Natural History*, XXV. 5–6).
26. *whoever wins need offer no explanations*: Tacitus, *Histories*, IV. 14.
27. *however mistaken the means*: The discussion of means and ends here would have brought to mind one of the most controversial ideas of Machiavelli: 'When they're weighing up what someone has achieved – and this is particularly true with rulers, who can't be held to account – people look at the end result. So if a leader does what it takes to win power and keep it, his methods will always be reckoned honourable and widely praised. The crowd is won over by appearances and final results'. See *The Prince*, translated by Tim Parks (London: Penguin, 2009), chapter xviii, p. 71. The idea of the end justifying the means was roundly condemned in Spain: see, e.g., Diego de Saavedra Fajardo (1584– 1648), *Idea of a Political-Christian Prince* (1640/42), no. 43. This said, the standard anti-Machiavellian position that some forms of deception *were* permissible, since necessary for the good of the state, tacitly accepted that some ends could justify certain otherwise undesirable means. Gracián enters the fraught debate here and his starting point is to caution against being so fastidious about means that we lose sight of our goal.
28. *Favonius*: Roman god of the west wind.
29. *warriors, conquerors and magnanimous*: Gracián alludes here to James the Conqueror (Jaime I, 1208–76) and Alfonso the Magnanimous (Alfonso V, 1396–1458).
30. *moral sense: Synteresis*, on which see note 9.
31. *Know how to refuse … much thought*: In the first published life of Ignatius (Latin 1572, Spanish 1583), Pedro de Ribadeneira (1526–1611) states that knowing how to refuse was one of the points emphasized by the saint (*Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, V.11). See also Ribadeneira, *Ignatius' Way of Governing*, 3.4 and Luís Gonçalves da Câmara, *Memories of Ignatius*, nos. 236b and 281b.
32. *having cleared up one world*: Possibly a reference to Ferdinand the Catholic (1452–1516), who reconquered the Muslim kingdom of Granada (1492) and sponsored Columbus' discovery of America (1492).
33. *greatest of the great captains*: Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba (1453–1515), called the Great Captain, who fought for the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, and won the kingdom of Naples for Spain from the French.

34. *Alexander wept … universal fame*: As Romera-Navarro (p. 158) and Blanco (p. 144) note, Gracián conflates two distinct episodes, Julius Caesar weeping before Alexander's statue (Suetonius, *Life of Caesar*, VII) and Alexander honouring Achilles' tomb (Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, xv).
35. *Know how to be all things to all people*: Compare 1 Corinthians 9:22. This way of proceeding was specifically recommended by St Ignatius. See, e.g., Ignatius, *Letters*, pp. 51, 213. Contemporary Jesuit accounts of the saint also stress the importance he placed on this point. See, e.g., Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Ignatius' Way of Governing*, 5.8 and his *Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, V.11; and Daniello Bartoli (1608–85), *Life of St Ignatius*, 1650 edn, IV.35.
36. *Proteus*: A sea god able to change his form.
37. *moderation in all things*: The idea is a classical commonplace, engraved on the temple at Delphi.
38. *extreme justice becomes unjust*: A translation of the tag '*summum ius, summa iniuria*' (Cicero, *On Duties*, I.x.33).
39. *Argos*: Mythical figure with a hundred eyes. After he was killed by Mercury, Juno set his eyes into the tail-feathers of her bird, the peacock.
40. *Homer nod*: A commonplace taken from Horace (*Art of Poetry*, 359) referring to errors caused by momentary inattentiveness.
41. *a large part of ruling is dissimulation*: This is one of the clichés of Baroque political thought, often expressed by means of an adage attributed to Louis XI of France, 'He who doesn't know how to dissimulate, doesn't know how to rule'.
42. *virtue is its own reward*: Seneca, *Letters*, 81.19.
43. *a good life … extension*: Gracián here treats literally an idea from Seneca: 'life, if you know how to use it, is long' (*On the Brevity of Life*, II.i).
44. *moral sense*: *Synteresis*, on which see note 9.
45. *Homer nodded … Alexander lost his position and his illusions*: Homer nodding is a commonplace from Horace (*Art of Poetry*, 359) referring to momentary lapses. Alexander had referred to himself as the 'son of Jupiter', so, as Romera-Navarro notes (p. 212), the reference here is presumably to his conceit being punctured by his dying at a young age.
46. *turn a mote into a beam*: Matthew 7:3–5.
47. *tally of ignominious actions*: Gracián actually refers in Spanish to the *libro verde* ('green book'), a manuscript listing the lineages of Aragonese nobility with non-

Christian ancestors.

48. *Do, and appear to do*: Compare Gracián's emphasis on *both* aspects, with Machiavelli's ultimately on only one: 'a leader doesn't have to possess all the virtuous qualities I've mentioned, but it's absolutely imperative that he seems to possess them. I'll go so far as to say this: if he had those qualities and observed them all the time, he'd be putting himself at risk. It's seeming to be virtuous that helps … What matters is that he has the sort of character that can change tack as luck and circumstances demand, and, as I've already said, stick to the good if he can but know how to be bad when the occasion demands.' See *The Prince*, chapter xviii, pp. 70–71.
49. *To go … so important*: Compare Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.8.
50. *most are ignorant*: Compare Ecclesiastes 1:15 (Vulgate version).
51. *either very like God or a complete animal*: An Aristotelian commonplace (*Politics*, 1253a).
52. *The wise person should be self-sufficient*: See Seneca, *Letters*, 9.3.
53. *all things to himself … he had all things with him*: Cicero (*Stoic Paradoxes*, 1.8) attributes this saying to Bias of Priene, one of the Greek Seven Wise Men, and Seneca (*Letters*, 9.18) to the Megarian philosopher Stilbo.
54. *if one universally accomplished friend … the universe*: Probably a reference to Cato the Elder, as Romera-Navarro notes (p. 267). See Livy's description in the *History of Rome*, XXXIX.40.
55. *the ruin of states*: A possible reference to the dangers of Machiavelli's 'reason of state', which of course went against received wisdom regarding the centrality of morality. On reason of state, see note 12.
56. *go in supporting … to come out achieving your own* : This is a strategy mentioned repeatedly by St Ignatius and one he says is typical of the devil (e.g. *Spiritual Exercises*, paragraph 332). But it is also one positively recommended by him: 'Whenever we wish to win someone over and engage him in the greater service of God our Lord, we should use the same strategy for good which the enemy employs to draw a good soul to evil. He enters through the other's door and comes out through his own.' See Ignatius, *Letters*, p. 51 (also p. 243). Compare aphorism 193.
57. *Speak, if you want me to know you*: Erasmus (c. 1469–1536) records Socrates saying this to a boy whose talents he wished to assess, the apophthegm's marginal note stating that 'speech is the mirror of the soul' (*Apophthegmata*, III.70).
58. *Martial's discreet Fabulla*: Martial, *Epigrams*, VIII.79.

59. *eagerness to bestow affection is a form of imprudence*: Cicero, *On Friendship*, XVII.63, XXII.85.
60. *moral sense*: *Synteresis*, on which see note 9.
61. *the saying … in the saddle*: A popular Golden Age saying, the second part of which stated 'and no one has sound judgement when angry'.
62. *three qualities of goodness*: In *The Critic* (II.2), Gracián lists the three qualities of friendship, and thus of goodness, as honour, enjoyment and utility.
63. *to share a bushel of salt*: An exaggeration of a well-known saying by Cicero (*On Friendship*, XVIII.67), itself cited in a discussion on whether old or new friends are best.
64. *Epictetus*: The works of Epictetus, alongside those of Seneca, were central to the Spanish interest in Stoicism that had a profound impact on political and moral thought during the seventeenth century.
65. *moral sense*: *Synteresis* on which see note 9.
66. *There are many … and others who think they know, but don't*: This cliché is frequently repeated in early modern Europe in discussions of scepticism.
67. *the pro and the contra … analysed*: Following Cicero's advocacy, such reasoning *ad utramque partem* (looking at both sides of an issue) was an important part of Humanist rhetoric and, thence, of sceptical discourse in the seventeenth century.
68. *even in a king*: An allusion to Pedro IV of Aragon (1319–87), who was known as the 'Ceremonious'.
69. *even aping facial flaws*: Romera-Navarro (p. 365) cites the example of a contemporary of Philip of Macedon, who had lost an eye in battle, trying to flatter him by wearing an eye-patch.
70. *Anything popular … use others to do it*: a much-repeated procedure of St Ignatius. See, e.g., Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Ignatius' Way of Governing*, 3.12 and Luís Gonçalves da Câmara, *Memories of Ignatius*, nos. 88 and 199.
71. *doing good is more pleasurable than receiving it*: See Acts 20:35.
72. *herbs of Thessaly*: See Juvenal, *Satires*, VI, 610–12.
73. *Beware … achieving their own*: A strategy frequently discussed by St Ignatius; see aphorism 144 and note 56.
74. *burning your fingers pulling things from the fire for them*: An allusion to a popular saying made even more famous by La Fontaine (1621–95) in his fable of the monkey and the cat: a cat is persuaded by a monkey to pull chestnuts from a fire which the

monkey then eats, the conclusion drawn being that this is like nobles suffering in the provinces for the benefit of the king (*Fables*, IX.17).

75. *foolishness compared with the wisdom of heaven*: See 1 Corinthians 3:19.
76. *one Great Captain, one perfect orator, one wise man … one outstanding king*: These are Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, Cicero, Seneca and Ferdinand the Catholic.
77. *Apelles*: Ancient Greek painter, synonymous with artistic excellence during the Renaissance and the Baroque.
78. *all things of this world are shadows of that above*: A key notion in Neoplatonism and found especially in ascetic literature of the period.
79. *setting light to the wonders of the world*: The temple of Artemis at Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of the world, was set ablaze by Herostratus in 356 bc.
80. *Corinth*: A byword for culture for Gracián (e.g., *The Critic*, II.iv).
81. *someone is truly wise who is wise once they're in the saddle*: Popular Spanish refrain, also alluded to in aphorism 155 (and see note 61).
82. *Our life is arranged like a play … end it well*: The metaphor of life as like a play, found in Epictetus (*Encheiridion*, 17), was fundamental to Baroque culture. It is famously expounded in Pedro Calderón de la Barca's sacramental drama, *The Great Theatre of the World* (mid 1630s).
83. *age of gold … age of iron*: Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, I.89–150) gives the four ages of man as those of gold, silver, bronze and iron.
84. *When you can't wear a lion's skin, wear a fox's*: The Spartan Lysander's saying – Plutarch, *Sayings of Kings and Commanders* (190e) and *Life of Lysander* (437a) – was one of the clichés of political statecraft. Cicero (*On Duties*, I.41) condemned both. The lion (strength) and the fox (cunning) were given renewed exposure in Machiavelli's *The Prince* (chapter XVIII), where the fox is made synonymous with not keeping one's word. There is a tendency in seventeenth-century Spain to see the advice as Machiavellian (see, e.g., Saavedra Fajardo, *Idea of a Political-Christian Prince*, XLIII).
85. *When something lies beyond your reach, disdain makes its appearance*: Blanco (p. 223) suggests there may be an allusion to Aesop's fable of the fox and the grapes, which the fox dismisses as sour when it can't reach them.
86. *Janus-like … Argos-like*: The two faces of the former and the many eyes of the latter made these two mythical figures emblems of prudence. This was particularly true of Janus, whose two faces meant that he looked both backwards and forwards, just as

prudence was held to look to the lessons of the past to secure the correct course of action in the future.

87. *Momus wanted … window in their chests*: The Greek god of mockery who berated Hephaestus for making humans without a window in their chests to see their true thoughts (Lucian, *Hermotimus*). The image of a hand with eyes in its palm was popularized by Alciato's emblem 'Sobrius esto …' ('Be sober … ').
88. *one ear for the accused*: For this anecdote, see Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, xlii.
89. *What use is knowledge … is true knowledge*: Such practical knowledge is, effectively, almost synonymous with prudence, which is focused on action. In so far as the *Oracle* as a whole delineates how to live (i.e., survive and thrive) in society, this aphorism encapsulates a key aspect of the whole work.
90. *Belgians*: The term could apply to the United Provinces in the north as well as to the southern provinces still under Spanish rule. Given that at the time he is writing the former were on the point of having their sovereignty recognized by the Spanish with the signing of the treaty of Münster in 1648, thereby ending the eighty-year war for independence from Spain, Gracián offers a pointed comparison between the two countries.
91. *Carry things through … flushing it out*: Pedro de Ribadeneira specifically highlights St Ignatius' vigilance in seeing things through (*Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, V.12).
92. *snake … dove*: Matthew 10:16. This biblical injunction to be astute is one of the most widely cited and discussed quotations in early modern political and moral thought. When prudence was personified, a snake was one of its positive attributes.
93. *one extreme or the other*. The other extreme to that dealt with here is to embrace your first impressions; see aphorism 227.
94. *Human means … great master*: The aphorism repeats a key teaching of St Ignatius. See Ignatius, *Letters*, p. 401; Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, V.11; Daniello Bartoli, *Life of St Ignatius*, 1650 edn, III.35; IV.35; Luís Gonçalves da Câmara, *Memories of Ignatius*, no. 234. The wording closest to Gracián's is found in Ribadeneira, *Ignatius' Way of Governing*, 6.14.
95. *as the old woman said to Hadrian*: Blanco (p. 238) refers here to Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 69.6.
96. *caution's mirror*: The mirror was a standard attribute of prudence when the virtue was personified.
97. *Ulysses*: Homer's mythical hero was a byword for astuteness and cunning, as here.

98. *eagle … Jupiter's bosom*: In Aesop's fable, the eagle falls out with the beetle. To prevent its eggs being pushed out of its nest by the beetle, the eagle appeals to Jupiter. He suggests it places its nest in his lap. But the beetle flies around Jupiter provoking him to stand up to brush it away, thereby causing the eagle's eggs to be smashed.
99. *even water belonging to another seems like nectar*: See Proverbs 9:17.
100. *Catholic monarch Isabella, and the Great Captain*: Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504), married to Ferdinand II of Aragon. Known as the Catholic Monarchs, the pair united Spain and defeated the Muslim kingdom of Granada (1492). The Great Captain is Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba (see aphorism 73 and note 33).
101. *there's only one way for the penny to drop*: i.e. straightaway.
102. *peacock … lion … camel … snake … dog … monkey*: In his *Wit and the Art of Ingenuity*, LVI, Gracián cites an allegory from Mateo Alemán's picaresque novel, *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599– 1604): learning of the harshness of their lives, the ass, dog and monkey ask the Creator to shorten their allotted span from thirty to ten years. These extra years are then added to the lifespan of humankind, extending it from thirty to ninety years. The result is that from thirty to fifty, humans will undertake the hard work of the donkey; from fifty to seventy, they will exhibit the bad behaviour and temperament of the dog; and from seventy to ninety, they will undo everything that makes them human and thereby be like the monkey. Of the remaining animals mentioned in the aphorism, the peacock represents vanity; the lion, heroism; the camel, hard work; and the snake, prudence.
103. *Antigonus … Zeno*: Antigonus of Macedonia's high regard for the Stoic philosopher Zeno is recorded in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, VII.6–9.
104. *that ridiculous offspring of the mountains, a mouse*: A phrase from Horace (*Art of Poetry*, 139) referring to poems that fail to live up to their grandiloquent openings. Typically, Gracián omits the word 'mouse' in the Spanish.
105. *an ounce of madness*: In *Wit and the Art of Ingenuity*, LXIII, Gracián attributes this idea to Seneca and explains it in terms of nature stealing from judgement to increase ingenuity. In *On Tranquillity of Mind*, XVII. 10, Seneca attributes it to Aristotle.
106. *they expect all circumstances … not the reverse*: A key teaching of St Ignatius was precisely to accommodate the self to situations, not the reverse. See Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, V.11 and Daniello Bartoli, *Life of St Ignatius*, 1650 edn, III.37.

107. *to combine esteem and affection is a real blessing*: This phrase was possibly negated in the first edition of the *Pocket Oracle*.
108. *Augustus*: Emperor of Rome, lived 63 bc–ad 14.
109. *chameleons*: The chameleon was held to live on air (see aphorism 28 and note 11).
110. *one person … even everyday things*: Possibly a reference to Philip II of Spain (1527–98), on the basis of what Gracián says of him in *The Hero*, V.
111. *person who wanted everyone to see him … his house from outside*: Romera-Navarro (p. 580) suggests this is a reference to Marcus Livius Drusus who wished his house to be built so that it would be open to the public gaze. See Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History*, II. 14.3. St Ignatius offers similar advice regarding what we say: see Ignatius, *Letters*, p. 52; and Daniello Bartoli, *Life of St Ignatius*, 1650 edn, IV.35.
112. *three S's make someone blessed: being saintly, sound and sage*: In *Wit and the Art of Ingenuity*, XLI, Gracián attributes this saying to Thales, one of the seven sages of Ancient Greece.